

## DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

### Induction to school and transitions through key stage one: Practice and perceptions

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**INDUCTION TO SCHOOL AND  
TRANSITIONS THROUGH KEY  
STAGE ONE: PRACTICE AND  
PERCEPTIONS**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the University's requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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# **ABSTRACT**

The thesis is about children's experience of the induction to Reception class and the transitions that they make through Key Stage One. It draws on the work of van Gennep (1960), Vygotsky (1978), Laevers (1997) and Bruner (1996) to explore rites of passage, well-being and acculturation that take place during induction and transitions.

The data is gathered mainly by semi-structured interviews to gain the perceptions of fifty children, their parents and teachers about the process of the children's (and their parents') induction at two schools in a town in Shropshire. Children are admitted to the schools in the term before their fifth birthday, thus there are three intakes a year. Children from each of the groups in both schools are included in the study. The research began just before the children started their induction programme in the term before they entered full-time schooling in the academic year 1994/1995. It explores preparations and concerns before starting school and as the children become incorporated into school life.

The study goes on to examine the views of twenty-four of these children, their parents and teachers, about the transitions that the children make from the end of their reception class until they leave Key Stage One in July 1997. It also looks at the changes made to the induction programmes during this time.

This is a relatively unresearched area and the study uncovered a number of critical factors that have not been brought together or presented in this way before. The main findings identify that the amount, and nature of, information given to parents and children is crucial before and during induction and transitions. If it is right then anxieties about the unknown are reduced, resulting in children's and parents' emotional well-being. The importance of a supportive friend during transitions is also highlighted. A further finding discloses that, far from parental partnership building throughout children's time in school, it decreases due to a lack of clarity about what it entails.

**KEY WORDS:**

Induction to school, Transition, Incorporation, Perceptions, Partnership



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# PART ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. WHAT'S THE STUDY ABOUT?

“The morning came, without any warning, when my sisters surrounded me, wrapped me in scarves, tied up my bootlaces, thrust a cap on my head, and stuffed a baked potato in my pocket.

‘What’s this?’ I said.

‘You’re starting school today.’

‘I ain’t. I’m stopping ‘ome.’

‘Now, come on, Loll. You’re a big boy now.’

‘I ain’t.’

‘You are.’

‘Boo-hoo.’

They picked me up bodily, kicking and bawling, and carried me up the road [to school].”

(Lee 1959, p.43)

Such was the introduction to school that Laurie Lee experienced circa 1920. Few children today would recognise this abrupt start to school which took Laurie Lee into the black hole of the unknown. Indeed, due to major studies in the field of admission and induction to school which have helped to shape and evolve practice (Cleave et al, 1982; Barrett, 1986; Ghaye and Pascal, 1988; Pascal, 1990; and Cleave and Brown, 1991), the importance of achieving an untroubled start to school is now recognised.

Not only is a smooth start seen as being influential in helping children to learn, but also, because childhood is regarded as having the potential antecedent for adult neurosis (James and Prout, 1990), each new start

becomes important for the future. However, there has been little recent research on induction and transition. The major data still comes from the Cleave, Jowett and Bate study of 1982 which explored the transition from pre-school to infant school made by thirty six children and Barrett's study of 1986 which aimed at improving understanding children's responses to starting school.

We live in a rapidly changing society with frequent changes within the education system which affect schools, children and their parents. Since the above studies were written, there have been major political influences on schools and a growing awareness of the need to attend to transitional entitlements (Lawrence 1994, p.162). The 1988 Education Reform Act brought greater emphasis to parents sending their children to a school of their choice (DES, 1991; DFE, 1994). Formula funding under the Local Management of Schools (LMS) directly links school income to pupil numbers and has led to marketing to attract customers (Tomlinson, 1993; Foskett, 1998), which, in turn, encourages schools to compete for pupils. Policy changes to raise standards have led to the introduction of goals for children by the time they enter compulsory education (SCAA, 1996); the introduction, under Section 9 of the Education (Schools) Act 1992 of inspection of schools (OFSTED, 1995); and the introduction of inspection of publicly funded nursery education under Section 5 of the Nursery Education and Grant Maintained Schools Act 1996 (OFSTED, 1998). From September 1998 all maintained schools will be required to use an

accredited baseline assessment scheme (SCAA, 1997) to “show the value the school is adding” (DfEE 1997b, p.17), help teachers to plan and check rates of pupil progress. Hence, there is growing pressure on primary schools to re-evaluate their admission and induction strategies.

Starting school is taking place at an increasingly younger age. The compulsory school starting age introduced in the 1944 Education Act is the term after a child’s fifth birthday. However, this is, in effect, being reduced through a number of government education initiatives. The Nursery Education Voucher Scheme which was introduced nationally in April 1997 and ended on 31 August 1997 (DfEE 1997a), brought early entry to school for many children. The introduction of the Nursery Education Grant and Early Years Development Plans (DfEE, 1997b) continues the legacy of a “part-time nursery education place to every eligible child whose parents want this” (DfEE 1997c). Furthermore, for those parents who want it, a nursery place for all four year olds will be offered from September 1998 (BBC, 1998), many of which will be in the reception class of a school and, therefore, heralding early induction to school. Coupled with this is the socio-political context in which there are changes in family and work structures which encourage mothers to go out to work, creating further pressure for early admission. Thus, starting school continues to make “a range of potentially stressful demands” (Ghaye and Pascal 1988, p.3) on practitioners, pupils and their parents and needs to be explored in the light of these new influences.

### **1.1.1. PUPILS, PARENTS AND PRACTITIONERS**

Many children will have experienced a bewildering range of transitions before starting school (DES 1990, para.104). Some children

“ . . . may be attending a confusing multiplicity of forms of provision, in some cases concurrently, in others serially, as parents move area, jobs, or because each type of provision offers different facilities.”

(David 1990, p.52)

However, “it should not be assumed that where this has happened a child will necessarily find a move to school any easier” (Dowling 1995, p.16). In each setting children will encounter different people with different values which may result in confusion about expectations. They may also encounter different staffing ratios. Continuity between pre-school and school, therefore, is important. Indeed, as long ago as 1931, the Hadow Report asserted that

“the psychological evidence indicates that what is really injurious to a sensitive child is an abrupt change in methods of teaching, in discipline and in general environment”

(Board of Education, 1931, para.53)

For some children it may be the first time that they have been parted from the informal world of home, or had to leave their parents for any length of time to ‘share’ a strange adult with a number of other children and make new friendships. Not only do children come to school with different experiences, but with different expectations, too.

Parents are concerned that their children should acquire skills, knowledge and values that they believe to be important (Tizard and Hughes, 1984). For some parents it may be the first time that they have placed the care of their child in the hands of another adult. For others the start of school might be seen as a significant life-change not in only in their child's life but in theirs, too. The introduction of a significant adult in the form of a teacher into their lives marks a turning point in the relationship between parent(s) and child (Burtscher, 1997). Therefore, not only is the start of school a time of psychological change for the child, but also for each family member. The subsequent network of friends and the quality of family relationships may, as a result, change both for children and adults.

Practitioners have some responsibility for the well being of children on entry to school. Blatchford et al (1982) advise that the child's first experience may set an enduring reaction that will structure his/her reactions to settings encountered later in life. Indeed, one might ask if the initial induction influences attitudes and learning behaviour throughout Key Stage One (KS1), for, as Bronfenbrenner (1979) stresses, the prognostic importance of the first ecological transition is a pattern for subsequent ones. The induction to school, therefore, is crucial to a child's future experiences as it might condition behaviour in the ensuing transitions. It might, then, be supposed that any early misadapatation to school may create serious problems for future social adaptation and that initial adjustment to school forms a pattern for further transitions, influences the

ability of the child to function in different environments and, moreover, that the consequences of early adaptation processes might have a long term influence (Kienig, 1997).

Headteachers are unlikely to perceive the induction to the reception class in isolation. The children are already on their way through school and the concerned headteacher will try to ensure that they have a smooth passage (Cleave and Brown 1991, p.214). This indicates that giving consideration to the various points of transition, not only at the initial induction to school but to those transitions through and out of the school, might also be significant and worthy of scrutiny.

“The frequent transitions of childhood provide strategic points of analysis since during them past, present and future are symbolically represented.”

(James and Prout 1990, p.220)

## **1.2. AIMS OF THE STUDY**

As a result of these factors there are a number of issues which the study explores. The central aim is to gain perceptions from pupils, parents and practitioners to identify and illustrate some of the critical features about the induction to school and transitions through KS1. Further objectives of the study are:

- To give a description of the admission policies and induction practices in maintained schools in the locality where the case studies take place;
- To inquire why parents choose a particular school for their child;
- To explore the extent to which parents prepare their children for school prior to entry;
- To look into parents' expectations as their child starts school;
- To gain an understanding of children's perception of school before they begin statutory education;
- To investigate the admission policies and ways in which induction practices are managed;
- To find out how children make sense of school;
- To investigate parents' perceptions of the start of school;
- To gain an understanding of participants' notions of partnership and its significance during the start of school and during transitions;
- To gain an insight into children's and their parents' perceptions of continuity and discontinuity as children make each transition through Key Stage One;
- To ascertain how schools evaluate their induction programmes and develop changes to their induction and transition systems over a three year period; and
- To consider ways of helping practitioners to question their induction and transition procedures.

### 1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In determining what the induction and transition might mean to each group some of the key research questions raised are:

For practitioners:

- How are the induction and the subsequent transitions managed?
- What changes take place to the programme during the time of the data collection? How do they come about?
- What strategies are employed to make the induction and subsequent transitions a stress-free and continuous experience for children?
- How are children helped in their emotional and social well-being during induction and transitions?
- What are the implications for home/school partnerships during induction and transitions?

For parents:

- What factors are weighed when choices are made about schools?
- What concerns and expectations are there about starting school?
- What role is taken in the induction and transitions?
- How is the partnership with school viewed?

For children:

- How is school perceived before induction?
- How is the culture of school assimilated?
- How is each transition through KS1 viewed with regard to friendships, teacher and classroom?
- What relevance is put on partnership?



It might be that, as a result of the study, generalisations can be drawn to improve the induction to school and the transitions through school for children, in order that they might settle into their new educational environment with less stress and maximise their learning potential.

A further question asks how can the information resulting from the data be communicated in order to raise discussion amongst practitioners?

## 1.4. THE STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

My study looks at the induction of children (and their parents) into two schools in Shropshire from the perspective of fifty children, their parents and practitioners. It also investigates the nature of the transitions that twenty four of these children make (twelve from each school) as they progress through Key Stage One.

Part Two explores the theoretical background which draws on the work of van Gennep (1960), Vygotsky (1978), Bruner (1996a) and others. It looks at the relationship between the various elements and seeks to develop a conceptual framework.

The methodology (Part Three) follows a naturalistic, ecological model of inquiry (Bronfenbrenner, 1989) in which there is a consideration of the ways in which the individual and the context relate to each other. It is concerned with gaining people's perceptions and interpretations of their understanding of their experiences (Marton, 1981; and Pramling, 1995), and was approached without any pre-determined outcomes in mind. It uses both quantitative and qualitative methods of gathering, analysing and communicating evidence in an attempt to explore the issues, understand people's reality and capture the complexities of their worlds. However, as Smith (1997) said

“ . . . we can never know, or know if we know, reality as it actually is.”

The findings and analysis (Part Four) follows the journey of the children and their parents in the two schools during the induction and subsequent transitions through school, and the way in which practitioners manage this process. It attempts to make comparisons between the two schools because

“comparisons are fundamental but complex tools for understanding development.”

(Tudge et al 1997b, p.1)

The literature is included in each chapter, but it by no means represents an exhaustive account of all the research into induction and transition. Rather, it is an attempt to indicate some of the major findings of relevant previous research in this field.

The elements of induction and transition overlap and create difficulties in compartmentalisation but, for the convenience of writing, this has to be the case. Nevertheless, some issues such as emotional well-being and home-school partnership weave themselves throughout. Composite fictional characters (Gura, 1996) tell the story through illustrative scenes and the whole is arranged

“as a florist arranges flowers, attempting to make them look natural while adjusting balance, colour harmony, height and width.”

(Waterland 1994, p.8)

Part Four opens with an overview of the induction systems in the schools in the area where the focus schools are situated. This is to set the two schools in context. The journey begins with the parents’ choice of school and addresses the issue of parents as consumers of, as well as partners in,

education. It goes on to explore the preparations that are made for children before they start school and highlights the needs of parents to have information about school and learning sooner rather than later. It looks at those concerns that parents have about their children before they start, particularly social and emotional care. The visits that the children make to school and the perceived need to get a good start to school in the form of familiarisation with the teacher and the building and continuity of learning is also explored.

A major development which arose during the period of this study was the Nursery Education Voucher Scheme which was introduced in four pilot areas in April 1996, with places available country-wide from April 1997 (DfEE 1996a, p.3). This scheme has now been abandoned but the effect that this has had is to admit children to school at a younger age in many areas of the country. Although this did not affect the children in this study sample, who started school in 1994/95, a discussion on admission policies is included in order to give some background to the debate about children starting school at four years of age that has been on-going for a number of years (Pascal, 1990; David, 1990; and Cleave and Brown, 1991).

The way in which children make sense of school is also a focus. This includes the way in which they gain a knowledge of the classroom culture in terms of language and systems, levels of confidence to meet new challenges and the way in which a partnership between their parents and the

school is perceived. Parents, too, embark on this journey through school with their children, learning the culture of the school and developing new relationships. Partnership has been identified as an important aspect of children's learning (DfEE, 1997b) and forms an important element of this study. The fluctuations in the partnership between home and school throughout the Key Stage are, therefore, considered.

The transitions that children make throughout the Key Stage are addressed. Some children make as many as five transitions during the time that they spend in KS1 which raises questions of transition management. One aspect of children's well-being at these times is the fluidity of friendships, and how they are supported or constrained by the setting.

The final section in Part Four describes the changes that have taken place in the two schools during the three years that the research was conducted and explores the complexities of these changes.

The concluding section (Part Five) reflects on the research process, summarises the main findings and discusses some implications for practice. The main findings identify how the quantity and nature of information given to parents and children is crucial before and during both induction and transitions. If it is right, then anxieties about the unknown are reduced. The combination of appropriate information and a supportive person, results in children's and parents' emotional well-being. The study suggests that a

smooth induction and transition are more likely if the home-school partnership is managed and understood. A further finding discloses that far from this partnership building throughout children's time in school it decreases, partly due to a lack of clarity about what it entails.

This study does not include the perspective of ethnic minorities or children with special educational needs, neither does it explore continuity of the curriculum. These may require whole studies in themselves.

## 1.5. DEFINITIONS AND SHARED MEANINGS

Before continuing I shall pause to share with you the way certain words are used in the study.

### Parents

Let me begin with the term ‘parents’ as it can no longer be based on the assumption that children live with two adults who are their natural parents, although this is still the case for many. There have been massive changes in the nature of family life, thus Bastiani and Doyle (1994) suggest that there are now

“children in lone parent families; children who live in ‘reconstituted’ families, with a mixture of natural and step-parents; children who are ‘looked after’ by local authorities; and children who live in families where cultural arrangements for parenting are shaped by significant differences of language and religion”.

(Bastiani and Doyle 1994, p.20)

Therefore, when the word ‘parent(s)’ is used it refers to those adults who are, or act as, the parent(s) of the child.

### Induction

Burke (1987, p.viii) states that

“the most common perception of induction is that it occurs as one enters a new position . . . . This narrow view ignores many early and important steps preceding the entrance to a first position . . . .”

For the purposes of this study the word ‘induction’ comprises the introduction to school from the first visit made by the child to the time at

which s/he settles. It constitutes all the activities and experiences that children may meet and includes

“all the conditions and processes by which individuals gain direction and encouragement through increased understanding”.

(Burke 1987, p.ix)

### Transition

‘Transition’, for the purpose of this study, is the process of change that children experience and the length of time involved to make such a change.

These include

- the time between the first visit and settling in;
- a change such as a long term physical move from one classroom to another during, or at the end of, a school year;
- a change of teacher during, or at the end of, a school year; and/or
- a change of children such as a group of children moving into, or out of, the class either during, or at the end of, a school year.



## PART TWO

### CONTEXT AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

#### 2.1. A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for the study draws on the disciplines of anthropology, sociology and psychology. It is informed by the work of van Gennep (1960), Vygotsky (1978), Bronfenbrenner (1979), Laevers et al (1997) and Bruner (1996a).

<b>Theorists:</b>	van Gennep, Bronfenbrenner	Laevers, Rutter, Gendlin, Gibson	Vygotsky, Bruner
	↓	↓	↓
<b>Discipline:</b>	social anthropological domain	experiential constructs	socio-cultural cognition

Figure 1. Theorists and their associated disciplines.

The epistemological elements are inter-linked and difficult to separate. The socio-cultural constructs informed by Bruner and Vygotsky are linked with the socio-psychological elements of Laevers, Rogers and Gendlin and with the socio-anthropological disciplines of van Gennep and Bronfenbrenner. However, for the purposes of discussing them further they are considered under sub-headings.

## **2.2. RITES OF PASSAGE**

Many writers (Woolfson 1995, p.25; Nutbrown 1996, p.53; and Bruce et al 1995, p.31) explain the start of school through a gardening analogy but, unlike plants growing in a garden, we live in a rapidly changing society where childhood is a life-space made up of continued social activity in which the individual lives, and learns to cope, by adapting to the given social conditions (Dencik, 1997). In this life-space children belong to several microsystems and commute between these environments, adapting to different demands and learning from each group and individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). However, before entering and becoming a member of a group, there are associated rites of passage (van Gennep, 1960).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) portrayed the developing child as being at the centre of an interconnected set of contexts or microsystems and that these are interrelated with, and affected by, other systems that influence the developing person. Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggests that these systems are 'nested' like a Russian doll and that individuals inhabit more than one microsystem. For example, each child might engage in a set of activities at home, another with his/her friends, another in an out of school activity, another at school. In each case the child develops in conjunction with different sets of social groups. In some instances some of the same people might inhabit similar groups, in other cases the people might all be different. This might be the case as a child transfers from one class to another with a new group of children but still meets the 'old' group at playtime. The

relationships between each of the microsystems constitute the mesosystem.

These links between settings have

“their indirect influence on the developing person through  
their effect on those who deal with him at first hand.”

(Bronfenbrenner 1979, p7)

There might also be links to those systems which the child may never enter but in which events occur that effect what happens to the child's immediate environment. Bronfenbrenner (1979) calls this the ‘exosystem’. These systems might include external influences such as political decisions which affect class sizes, or a local education authority's decision about their policy for age of entry to school.

The notion of rites of passage during the induction to the reception class and the transitions that children make through school in this study is based on the work of van Gennep (1960) who explores a number of situations in which the individual passes through transitional stages. These are cushioned by rituals and ceremonies (rites of passage), associated with a particular situation, which incorporate the individual into the group, thus changing the individual from one status to another.

“The life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another. Wherever there are fine distinctions among age or occupational groups, progression from one group to the next is accompanied by special acts . . . . Transitions from group to group and from one social situation to the next are looked on as implicit in the very fact of existence . . . . For every one of these events there are ceremonies whose

essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally well defined.”  
(van Gennep 1960, p.3)

Van Gennep proposes that a complete scheme of rites of passage would theoretically include “preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition), and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation)” (van Gennep 1960, p.11). One of the first studies to relate the work of van Gennep to school admission was Ghaye and Pascal (1988). This discussed children’s ‘separations’ in the daily ebb and flow between home and school, ‘transitions’ in moving from one activity to another and ‘incorporations’ where a child is helped to become part of a larger group.

In my study the emphasis is on preparation and induction to school where children and their parents go through various ceremonies such as visiting school on pre-entry visits, buying the school uniform and separating on the first day of school. Recognising and acknowledging the first visit to school, the first day at school, the first teacher are part of the rites of passage that children go through during their induction to school. Transition is the change that children experience on a wider scale (see Chapter 1.5), while incorporation holds a similar meaning to that in the Ghaye and Pascal study (1988).

Starting school is influenced by western ideas of childhood and adults’ cultural views on the time of childhood. During childhood the passage of time is marked out in an individual’s life through the concept of age, most

noticeably for children as each birthday approaches. James and Prout (1990) suggest that within childhood there is time *of* childhood and time *in* childhood and that “age fixes the limits and boundaries [and] . . . exerts a powerful and constraining force on the daily lives of children” (James and Prout 1990, p.219). These restraints are usually imposed by others such as the family, but more often by the welfare system or the education system. For example, the statutory age at which children start school is the term after their fifth birthday.

Age-grades, or life stages, structure the movement, over time, of children from infancy through childhood and adolescence to adulthood whereas age-class, a more formalised system organised around schooling, groups children into age classes with whom they move sequentially as year succeeds year. Thus, the structure of the school system with its ages of entry into, and exit from, different parts serves to regulate times for transitions. This age system can create problems in relation to ideas of social and educational maturity in the transition to school and brings into frame the notion of “school readiness” (Gredler, 1992). James and Prout (1990) suggest that for an individual child it can be potentially stigmatising as it “risks being interpreted in terms of immaturity, or precocity, backwardness or giftedness” (James and Prout 1990, p.224).

Van Gennep stresses that “the repetition of the first act has a decreasing importance” (van Gennep 1960, pp.177), thus there is a decrease in the

strength of the preliminal, liminal and postliminal stages of the cycle as people pass through each transition period. Van Gennep (1960), argues that “the second act no longer presents anything new; it marks the beginning of habituation” (van Gennep 1960, p.178) and therefore needs no initiation or induction. This study contends that each time a child makes a transition it is a new start and the child will, at each transition, go through the three stages of rites of passage that van Gennep outlines. Throughout the life stage of childhood there is not only the initial induction to school but there are also a series of small transition points which together make the initiation into school. Nevertheless, for children themselves these points of partial transition through the life stage of Key Stage One (KS1) can take on quite intense meaning. Thus, it is not only the move between life stages such as from an under five’s setting to infant school which “implicitly recognizes and reflects the movement out of infancy into childhood, from the domestic world of the family to the culture of children” (James and Prout 1990, p.233), but also the moves within a life stage, from age-class to age-class, that are important.

### **2.2.1. PRELIMINAL RITES**

If van Gennep’s three-fold structure were to be followed, the transition to the start of school would be from one life stage to another, from pre-school to school. His first stage is of preliminal rites, in which he suggests that passagees are stripped of their previous social role. During this time children may be given glimpses of their move from infancy to childhood.

For example, parents may talk about 'big' school to their child or staff at under five's settings may discuss the forthcoming move to school and, as the time approaches, some of the procedures of reception class may be adopted by the pre-school setting. Myths about school may abound, causing anxiety and tension between wanting to enter the transition stage and staying in the safety of the known.

The transition from age-class to age-class may be seen as a succession of stages for each individual although children do not necessarily move with an entire age-class. It is sometimes the case that, due to school organisation and numbers of children, age-classes are divided and thus children become a member of a new group and perhaps re-form as the original group at a later stage. As we shall see, some children may make up to five transitions during KS1. The preliminal rites may include anticipating the transition to the next class, perhaps visiting that class or meeting the teacher or new children.

Transitions within school for children and their parents are not necessarily even. Sometimes a transition may occur soon after a first one as in the case of children moving from one class to another after one term in school, or less frequently, for those children who stay with one teacher for two years before moving to another class. Neither do they necessarily repeat themselves exactly. The preparation and move to another class might be broached in different ways by different teachers, the structures of the school

might vary according to the number of children in a year group, or a child might proceed from one year group to the next and become a member of a class formed of different children, thus losing some close friendships.

Van Gennep (1960, p.175) suggests that there are rites of the first time and that only the first time counts. This would suggest that, with their first child, parents go through the rites of initiation and that the first child starting school holds more significance and importance than the induction or transitions of subsequent children. For parents, therefore, the induction and transitions of their following children “no longer presents anything new; it marks the beginning of habituation” (van Gennep 1960, p.178). However, because they have a better understanding of the process they are possibly able to guide their later children through the process helping them to understand the situation more readily with their enhanced knowledge.

By the time the transition from the primary to secondary phase takes place the outward ritual has disappeared for parents altogether and

“it is a rite without a ritual. The child has the event, the teachers have the event: the first day of school. Parents don’t.”

(Kell 1992, p.A8)

### **2.2.2. LIMINAL RITES**

The second stage, liminal rites, during which children occupy an ambiguous zone out of social time and space, is represented through children making pre-start visits to school, preparations at home and in under five’s settings.



Territorial passage or moving from one group to another is often ritually expressed by passage under a portal (van Gennep 1960, p.192) such as entering the classroom. It can also be seen as a frontier to be crossed, for example crossing the school boundary and entering the school grounds. Rites of separation when leaving home and arrival and returning are also included in this stage (van Gennep 1960, p.35). Children may develop situational personalities which they adapt, having one behaviour for the school situation and another for the home.

Turner (1969) elaborated van Gennep's work, particularly the second stage, the liminal zone, and developed the notion of "threshold people" who

"are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial."

(Turner 1969, p.95)

Turner outlined the way in which the behaviour of novices is as though they are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition in order "to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life" (Turner 1969, p.95). He suggests that there is a transient humility where pride is tempered during the transition but also where beginners become a community of equals together and among themselves develop "an intense comradeship and egalitarianism" (Turner 1996, p.96).

This levelling is partly a destruction of the previous status and partly a preparation in order to cope with their new responsibilities, where liminality is a blank slate on which to inscribe knowledge of the forthcoming status and to learn a role identity; the role of pupil in which children

“begin to recognise that their conduct creates expectations, and that they must introduce new social and cognitive competencies into their behavioural repertoire.”

(Bernard Van Leer Foundation 1993, p.13)

The start of school means a re-organisation of roles and change of identity from pre-school child to school girl/boy, and a change of family relationships in the form of separation from parents. However, the change of status or role from pre-school child to school girl/boy happens on one day, the first day of school.

“The developmental importance of ecological transitions derives from the fact they almost invariably involve a change of *role*, that is, in expectations for behavior associated with particular positions in society. Roles have a magiclike power to alter how a person is treated, how she acts, what she does, and thereby even what she thinks and feels. The principle applies not only to the developing person but to others in her world.”

(Bronfenbrenner 1979, p.6)

This suggests that it is not only the child who takes on a new role. The start of school brings a role change for parents in that their status changes to ‘parent of school-aged child’ and they move into a new phase of their lives as their child begins school. It is they who respond to their children’s needs and go through the rites of passage with them; starting school and entering each new phase with and through their children. They undergo a role reorganisation in having to deal with expectations of teachers and other

parents and a reorganisation of relationships as their child becomes more independent. However, Griebel and Niesel (1997) found that although transition processes bring with them strong emotions and stress, parents did not expect a transition for themselves.

Another trait that Turner (1969) cited is that in many kinds of initiation the beginners of both sexes are dressed alike and referred to by the same term. For example, most school uniforms are now similar both for girls and boys and the new entrants in many schools may be referred to as ‘the new children’.

The liminal phase of starting school has become a state in itself, a transitional period which has acquired a certain autonomy (van Gennep 1960, p.191). A stage which needs to be gone through before balance and routine are once again restored, where children and parents “go from something familiar, habitual and stable through a process of reorganisation until a new stability is reached” (Kell 1992, p.A8). It provides an orientation for understanding the intricacies and the order of rites, preliminary to the event.

During the liminal stage of making a transition from one class to another the children may visit the next class. This is usually followed by a school holiday and a re-adjustment in thinking from, for example, being a Reception class child to becoming a Year One child, or a Year One child to

a Year Two child. However, it could be thought that there is no need to look upon these as transitions if

“primary education is being seen, not as an end in itself or merely preparatory to secondary education, but as part of a reasonably consistent experience offered to pupils from age five (or earlier) to 16”

(Richards 1996, p.22)

### **2.2.3. POSTLIMINAL RITES**

The third stage, (postliminal rites) is one in which children are re-aggregated and conferred new identities and roles. During this stage they acquire the new culture.

“Such changes of condition do not occur without disturbing the life of society and the individual, and it is the function of rites of passage to reduce their harmful effects.”

(van Gennep 1960, p.13)

As will become evident in my study, this process takes from between three weeks to a year to achieve for induction, depending on the individual and the circumstances. Similarly, the time varies at other transitions.

Transitions form the time element of my framework for the child and family. Bronfenbrenner refers to the passage of time that an individual goes through as the chronosystem.

“Chronosystem effects are those that relate to change or stability in the various contexts that have an impact (direct or indirect) on the developing person and changes in the nature and characteristics of that person”

(Tudge et al 1997a, p. 90)

Children's development is not context-free. Changes occur in their settings and roles such as entry into school and changes in status such as change from being a Year One child to being a Year Two child. Therefore we must also acknowledge the relationship between the individual, the physical environment (Gibson, 1979) and the people who come and go within that setting; the social relevance of the setting (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

### 2.3. EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

At the centre of the induction to school and each transition is the emotional well-being of every child. If children are going to settle into their new environment quickly then a secure attachment to the teacher and high levels of self-esteem are important to help children respond to social factors of the setting. Certain styles of teacher behaviour have been found to be related to increased pupil learning (Rogers, 1983), therefore the teacher's attitude plays an important part in introducing children to a new setting and in establishing routines and classroom ethos.

Feelings are important in "shaping judgements as well as forming concepts" (McCarthy 1998, p.9) although Rutter and Rutter (1992, p.32) state that personalities are not necessarily shaped by experiences which occur during the first years of life. Rather, it is the concept of self and the resilience that children develop in spite of adversity, which affect their psycho-social functioning (Rutter, 1997). Goleman (1995) cites the work of Csikszentmihalyi (1990) and explores feelings in terms of 'flow' where

"flow represents perhaps the ultimate in harnessing the emotions in the service of performance and learning. In flow the emotions are not just contained and channeled, but positive, energized, and aligned with the task at hand."

(Goleman 1995, p. 90)

Laevers (1997) builds on the work of Rogers, Rutter and Csikszentmihalyi and describes children with high levels of well-being as feeling "like fish in water" in their educational environments and able to maximise their learning potential. The resulting state of well-being gives "a fair amount of

self-confidence and self-esteem, as well as a big portion of fighting spirit” (Laevers et al, 1997 p.15). In order to achieve this “all-round functioning state” each individual’s basic needs must be satisfied. Laevers et al (1997, p.16), suggests that these are physical needs; the need for affection, warmth and tenderness; the need for safety, clarity and continuity; the need for recognition; the need to experience oneself as competent; and the need to be morally ‘correct’ and to give life a meaning.

An induction which enables children to ‘swim’ through is going to help children to settle more quickly into school and become more effective members of the class, than an induction that hinders. The signs of well-being according to Laevers et al (1997, p.17) are openness and receptivity; flexibility; self-confidence and self-esteem; being able to defend oneself, assertiveness; vitality; relaxation and inner peace; enjoyment without restraints; and being in touch with one’s self. Equally, with the other transitions, well-being is important in helping children to be assimilated into their new class.

“Assimilation is simply the application of an established behaviour pattern to a familiar or new situation. If the behaviour is successful, the child is not forced to change his behaviour in the new situation. However, if the behaviour is not successful, the child must adapt or change his behaviour to the new situation. Accommodation is changing an existing behaviour pattern that does not work in the new situation”

(Birns and Golden 1973, in Laevers, p.57)

### **2.3.1. PERCEPTIONS OF THE ENVIRONMENT**

Events such as separation from their parents, meeting a new environment, having to get acquainted with new adults and children, getting to know new social rules and behaviours are part of children's experiences of starting school. Gendlin (1964) defined experience as

“the process of concrete, bodily feeling which constitutes the basis matter of psychological and personality phenomena”

(Gendlin 1964, in Laevers 1993, p.55).

This leads us to Bronfenbrenner's 'person-process-context' model which

“requires that researchers consider the interactive ways in which developing individuals are influenced by and simultaneously influence the context that envelops them”

(Bronfenbrenner 1988, in Tudge et al 1997, p.92).

The person-process-context model focuses attention on aspects of both people and the environment. However, it might be that a similar classroom environment affects children during transitions in different ways. In my study it was noted that children reacted in different ways the first time they entered their classroom on a pre-entry visit. This might have been to do with their level of confidence rather than the environment or the people. Bronfenbrenner's statement above suggests that groups or individuals will influence a degree of change on each other. In his later work he is

“at pains to point out that the effects of individual and environmental factors are not only simply additive, but may vary both in strength and direction.”

(Tudge et al 1997a, p.94).



Building on the work of Gibson (1979), who explored the relationship between people and their physical environment, Neisser (1988, 1993), describes a framework for understanding the self, for “perception of the environment is necessarily perception of the self” (Tudge et al 1997a, p.79). Neisser suggests that there are at least five kinds of self knowledge: ecological, interpersonal, extended, private and conceptual, but that the ecological and interpersonal self form the foundation for the later development of the other three.

Through being actively engaged with their environment children acquire knowledge of the world and these same interactions contribute to a child’s sense of self (Neisser, 1993). While Gibson proposes that perception systems allow for acquisition of knowledge about what things are, with respect to culturally specified meaning, Neisser’s proposal of a second perception system allows the person to acquire knowledge about categories to which things belong. For example these may be the rules of behaviour for different aspects of school life such as playtime, lunch time, assembly and the classroom. Thus people’s actions are guided by perception, but also, that action over time informs their perception. This links with the work of Bruner (1996a) who proposes that by taking part in a culture, children acquire the culture of the organisation.

**2.3.2. PARENTS' WELL-BEING**

Children's induction and transitions also make an impact on their parents and their well-being (Elfer, 1997). Concerns about separation from their children, the safety and care aspects of the setting or about the nature of the partnership with school and the information exchange systems, might cause anxiety which is transmitted to their child and, in turn, affect the child's emotional state. The start of school may be the first contact that parents have had with the school system since being a pupil themselves which may bring associated feelings (Waterland, 1994). Therefore parents' needs and well-being are also important.

To meet children's needs, parents themselves need to be confident individuals (Pugh et al, 1994). This may come about through past experiences, home, social position and employment status, but equally it may be to do with the way in which the school develops the well being of parents. Indeed, Griebel and Neisel (1997), suggest that teachers should act as professional guides for the family.

## 2.4. SOCIAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

There is not always a distinct step between each of van Gennep's three stages, but rather a blurring at the edges; an evolution rather than a transition. Children may have become familiar with the building and some of the systems during the induction or transition but becoming incorporated into the school system, developing friendships and making sense of the classroom culture is more gradual. Starting school also means

“living outside the familiar context, meeting a new environment, having to get acquainted with new adults and children, getting to know new social rules and values”  
(Thyssen, 1997)

During this social change children might need support to adapt to new situations and to acquire social flexibility, make choices and integrate different experiences to make a coherent understanding (Dencik, 1997).

Vygotsky's (1978) work demonstrates that children's learning is a social activity which develops through interaction with adults and other children. He found that if a child received support from an adult or knowledgeable peer in the Zone of Proximal Development, the child could gain new learning beyond his/her existing level of competency. The zone of proximal development is

“the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.”

(Vygotsky 1978, p.86)

The Zone of Proximal Development defines those functions which have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions such as children's understanding about school, its culture and its systems and rules, the role of adults within it and ways in which to develop friendships with other children.

### **2.4.1. FRIENDSHIPS**

Children's early social experiences, not just with adults but also with their peer group, are important to an individual's development (Deegan 1996, p.20). Certainly, Deegan (1996, p.36) has indicated that children's friendships show promise as motivational contexts for learning. In Vygotsky's theory,

“learning takes place through interaction with more competent others, and all development is framed within a context that is socially created at both local and broad societal levels and is affected by the developing nature of the individual.”

(Tudge et al 1997a, p.74).

Starting school is just one social aspect where children learn new patterns of behaviour and make new friends. Pollard (1996, p.307) asserts that building relationships with other children is a major challenge when children begin to make their way outside the home. Indeed, Putallaz and Gottman (1981, p.116) state that

“a fair number of pre-school and elementary school children fail to acquire any friends or only have a few friends at best”.

Winterhoff (1997) suggests that there are three sub-systems, within the wider sociocultural system of development, which constrain friendships.

These are:

“(1) the pool of possible companions, (2) children’s social activity settings, and (3) the control network made up of the people who actually exert influence over children’s immediate activity.”

(Winterhoff 1997, p.224)

He puts forward that it is the organisation and structuring of the social setting for children which helps to promote friendships (Winterhoff 1997, p.222).

#### **2.4.2. LEARNING THE CULTURE**

Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, p.258) macrosystems allow for differences of ideology and structure within particular cultures or sub-cultures. For example the teacher establishes a classroom culture within the school’s cultural traditions of entry arrangements which, in turn, operates within a market economy culture. Bruner (1996b, p.11) suggests that there is always a culture present but the task is to understand what that culture is and to look at it realistically. For

“it is culture, not biology, that shapes human life and the human mind, that gives meaning to action . . . .”

(Bruner 1990, p.34)

Kurtz-Costes et al (1997, p.163) suggest that culture is used

“to represent the values, traditions, behaviors, and beliefs characteristic of a group of people.”

Schein's definition goes some way towards establishing this notion of culture:

“A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.”

(Schein 1992, in Neville 1995, p.30)

The move from home culture to school culture, oral culture to written culture, is not all learned in the liminal stage. It spills over into the post liminal start of school. The length of this adjustment will vary for each family and teacher.

Vygotsky emphasised the importance of culture and society in learning.

Bruner develops this notion and states that

“you cannot understand mental activity unless you take into account the cultural setting and its resources, the very things which give mind its shape and scope. Learning, remembering, talking, imagining: all of them made possible by participating in a culture.”

(Bruner 1996a, p.x)

The culture of the family, school and society is pervasive and influences what we do. Bruner (1996a, p.29) argues that cultures are composed of institutions which specify what roles people play and he suggests that participation in the culture helps in understanding that culture.

“much of what is involved in being a member of a culture is doing what the “things” around you require . . . “

(Bruner 1996a, p.151)

Thus, by taking part in the life of the school and having opportunities to deal with the culture of school, children construct their own realities and meanings then adapt them to the system, and acquire the school's ways of perceiving, thinking, feeling, and carrying out discourse. Woods (1990, p.4) cites an example of a child watching the behaviour of others in the class in order to search for clues and learn appropriate behaviour.

However, the group culture cannot be seen "simply as a reified or separate entity" (Neville, 1995) as individuals will bring their own culture (which is often rooted in more than one culture) to the group culture. Children may belong to several groups and may, as a result, play alternate roles at home and school which have different codes of conduct and which may cause inner conflict.

Acculturation may be defined as a culture change that results from continuous, first hand contact between two distinct cultural groups with the greatest changes usually occurring in the nondominant group (Redfield et al, 1936). It is both an individual and a group phenomenon and involves a process of change and development; a becoming rather than a being. "When pupils meet a teacher for the first time there are a number of unknowns (on both sides)" Woods (1990, p.5). Any cultural change, whether between groups or individuals, almost always leaves both sides in a changed state although the degree of change will vary (Kurtz-Costes et al 1997, p.182).

“From the very first moment of starting school, children are active participants in the construction of classroom order”.

(Woods 1990, p.3)

During the induction to school children will meet some cultural behaviours which they might not have come across before, such as having separate toilets for girls and boys, sitting without talking with a large group of children or the different use of words. Expectations of language and behaviour may differ from that used at home or pre-school (Marshall 1988, p.30). There may be new meanings for familiar words such as the word ‘hall’ or learning the implicit message behind phrases such as ‘sitting up straight’, ‘looking this way’, ‘being ready’ and ‘sitting beautifully’ (Cleave and Brown, 1991). Certainly much of meaning-making involves language (Willes, 1983) and it is likely that children will acquire the host language as well as learn what is valued in the new situation. One way in which teachers may help children make sense of the school culture is through ‘as if’ behaviour (Edwards and Knight 1994, p.15) where they act ‘as if’ the children were already making sense of the school culture. However, children’s different rates of development, of understanding and of language acquisition may mean that there are different interpretations of the same messages.

Not only do children learn the classroom culture but also playground lore. However, Barnes (1995, p.269) suggests that playground culture is unique to children and that it is one from which adults are excluded.



Some children may put aside the culture of the under-five's setting, while bringing some of it with them. Theories developed in one cultural setting also hold elsewhere (Kurtz-Costes et al 1997, p.168) and "if customs are more rather than less similar across the two societies, acculturation should occur more easily" (Kurtz-Costes et al 1997, p.180).

Each class of children at school has its own culture. Children become members of a host culture as they move from one class to another, established, class. As each child progresses through school and belongs to more groups each will become a 'multi-person' and more pluralistic.

"For many children, positive experiences with a culture enhance self-esteem, which in turn better enable the child to step forth assertively in new situations, leading to greater acculturation, and so the cycle continues"

(Kurtz-Costes et al 1997, p.177)

Over time children might modify their own culture through prolonged contact with the school culture. Education therefore, is

"a complex pursuit of fitting a culture to the needs of its members and of fitting its members and their ways of knowing to the needs of the culture"

(Bruner 1996a, p.43)

Changes to the induction and transition systems may be influenced both by internal and external contexts but are managed by the school for the benefit of the children. Bruner goes further and suggests that children should participate in the creation of the school culture:

“ . . . school is a place not just for subject matter teaching but also a place for re-inventing, refurbishing and refreshing culture in each generation. . . . During the month of September, i.e. the opening of school, we create a special form of alienation for children. . . . School for children is a tremendous responsibility to recreate at their level the culture in which they are going to live and they have to recreate it at every level.”

(Bruner 1996b, pp.13-14)

## 2.5. A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of the study identifies and employs three main disciplines; social-anthropology, experiential constructs and socio-cultural cognition. From each of these is extracted certain key features which seem the most appropriate when attempting to explain aspects and processes of transition and those ways in which the child's experience might be improved at different stages of those transitions. From the work of Bronfenbrenner comes the notion of the child at the centre of an interconnected set of systems; from van Gennep the concept of rites of passage associated with transitions, with a decreasing strength in the stages of the transition cycle. Feelings experienced at separation, adaptation and assimilation into a new system, and perceptions of self are drawn from the work of Csikszentmihalyi, Gendlin, Rutter and Laevers. Concepts of the social environment and the influences of culture come from Vygotsky and Bruner. This is perhaps best represented as a diagram:

van Gennep Bronfenbrenner	Laevers, Rutter Gendlin, Gibson	Vygotsky Bruner
↓	↓	↓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• rites of passage</li> <li>• induction</li> <li>• transitions</li> <li>• 'nesting'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• adaptation</li> <li>• attachment</li> <li>• assimilation</li> <li>• making sense of the physical environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enculturation</li> <li>• making sense of the social environment</li> <li>• incorporation</li> </ul>

Figure 2. Theorists and their associated concepts

Thus it can be seen in Figure 3 that my study bridges psychological and sociological disciplines:

sociological	↔	psychological
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• structures</li> <li>• processes</li> <li>• rituals</li> <li>• separation</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• belonging</li> <li>• feelings</li> <li>• separation</li> </ul>

Figure 3. The sociological and psychological elements

This conceptual framework explores the links and relationship between these various concepts and is represented in Figure 4. This is just one way of exploring these particular issues and there might well be others.

emotional and social well-being		
↓↑		
<b>preliminal rites</b> → induction rites of passage preparation	<b>liminal rites</b> → transition separation links	<b>postliminal rites</b> → incorporation acculturation identity
↑↓		
values, attitudes and culture		

Figure 4. A Conceptual Framework for the Study

The theoretical strands explained above permeate throughout my study. For ease of reading and convenience the study is structured under headings but every aspect is linked and can be placed within this conceptual framework.

# **PART THREE**

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. INTRODUCTION**

The main purpose of this study is to gain an insight into people's perceptions of the induction to Reception class and the transitions through Key Stage One (KS1). The people involved were fifty children, their parents, teachers, and induction co-ordinators in two schools. There were three admissions each year in the term in which children were 4 years and 8 months old, and I interviewed children, their parents and teachers from each admission. In this longitudinal study the collection of data took place over three years and two months, starting in the term before the first group of children entered full time schooling in the academic year 1994/95. It documents the induction process in the two schools, the acculturation of the children as they enter school and move from one class to another, their perceptions and that of the associated adults at each transition point. It also explores some of the changes that have taken place over the three years to the management of the induction and transitions at both schools.

A literature search of recent and relevant work in the field of starting school and children's transitions was conducted. The evidence gathered strengthened my knowledge and enabled my work to proceed from an informed base.

To find out the answers to some of the questions posed in the introduction and in order to gain perceptions, I needed to consider the best way of accessing people's thoughts and experiences. The methodological tools that I used were interviews, observations, and a questionnaire that resulted in a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. These are explained further in Chapter 3.4. This approach elicited information about people's experiences, thoughts and feelings and helped to distinguish and describe the variations in perceiving and experiencing induction and transitions through KS1. The process of analysis took place alongside collecting data and writing, with interpretation building throughout the time of the study.

Chapter 3.7 explores the way in which the findings are reported. As a means of communicating the findings I have constructed composite characters from the interviewees to create two families, radio and newspaper characters, and teachers. I try to build rounded characters who gather a history as their story unfolds. The resulting allegory is written in a number of genres that try to capture some of the influences on children, their parents and teachers. I have attempted to keep close to the information gathered and draw out the main issues in an accessible way.

However, it is not

“compiled into factually accurate accounts, but rather serve as a corpus from which the researcher actively selects, transforms, and interprets the material at hand - sometimes without leaving traces of the successive steps taken along the way.”  
(Miles and Huberman 1994, p.298)

### 3.2. PHENOMENOGRAPHY

The study is about gaining perceptions and interpretations of significant aspects of people's reality and understanding of experiences and those ambiguities in their perceptions. Therefore, I shall spend a few moments exploring the notion of phenomenography as it constitutes a view of knowledge and

“qualitative descriptions of peoples' ways of thinking about something”

(Pramling 1995, p.135)

Marton (1981, p.180) describes phenomenography as

“research which aims at description, analysis, and understanding of experiences; that is, research which is directed towards experiential description”.

By using semi-structured interviews I was able to ask people about their thoughts and encourage them to talk about their conception of reality.

However, as Gibson (1979, in Tudge et al 1997, p.79) stated

“perception cannot be understood by examining the perceiver alone, but only by examining the relationship between the perceiver and the environment that is the object of perception”

My study explores the relationship between the participants' perceived reality and lived experiences of the induction to school and transitions throughout KS1. In considering children's perceptions I needed to become skilled at letting children expose their ideas, reflect upon their world and communicate their experiences and feelings. (See section 3.4.3 which addresses interviewing children.)

The value of phenomenography is that I was able to gain

“qualitatively different ways in which people experience and understand various aspects of the world around them”

(Pramling 1996, p.4)

The results might help practitioners to find out the critical, and perhaps taken-for-granted, aspects of children’s start to school and help children deal with changes in their lives.

### **3.3. THE METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN**

The planning and design of the study began in September 1993. A ‘map’ of the design might help to give a more easily accessible overview. (See ‘The Research Design’ Word Chart 1.)



## THE RESEARCH DESIGN

	1993/1994	1994/1995 Reception	1995/1996 Year One	1996/1997 Year Two	1997/1998
September	Contact LEA	Dissemination	Dissemination	Dissemination	Dissemination
October	Write research proposal and research questions	Interview after 6 weeks Pre-admission interviews Observations.	Interviews at six weeks into Year One: 24 children/parents	Interviews at six weeks into Year 2 Analysis	Analysis and writing
November	Negotiate access to schools Literature search	Send questionnaire. Feedback to schools.	Feedback to schools	Feedback to schools	..
December	Registration. Begin writing methodology	Interviews end of first term	Literature search Writing	Literature search	..
January	Devise questionnaire	Feedback to schools	Literature search	Literature search	..
February	Draft first interview schedules. Pilot	Interviews after six weeks	Literature search Writing	Literature search Writing	Share work with 'stakeholders'
March	Photos for children's interviews. Discuss schedules with co-ordinators	Feedback to schools. Draft interview schedules 2 <sup>nd</sup> photo album	Draft interview schedules	Draft interview schedules	Analysis and writing
April	Photo album. Send letter to parents. Check tape-recorder and play-pack. Arrange interviews.	Observations. Pre-admission interviews Interviews end of first term. Pilot interviews	Pilot interviews	Pilot interviews	Analysis, writing and literature search
May	Pre-admission interviews.	Feedback to schools Interviews after six weeks	Literature search Writing	Literature search	..
June	Observations. Feedback to schools.	Feedback to schools Interviews end of first term	Literature search Writing	Analysis	..
July	Interview staff. Literature search	End of YR interviews Thank you letters to parents. Feedback to schools.	End of Year One interviews. Thank you letters to parents. Feedback to schools	End of Year Two interviews. Thank you letters to parents. Feedback to schools	Submit thesis
August	Draft interview schedules	Draft interview schedules Writing	Draft interview schedules Writing	Writing	

**Word Chart 1**

The fieldwork began in October 1993 when I contacted two Local Education Authority (LEA) advisers in the authority where I live - the early years adviser and a primary adviser - to discuss which schools I might approach to conduct research from the summer of 1994. Bell (1987, p.42) suggests that many LEAs have a ruling that research intended to be carried out in maintained schools must be agreed by the LEA. However, with the introduction of Local Management of Schools, the LEA stated that schools are now autonomous and it is the headteacher and governors of the school rather than the LEA from whom I needed to seek permission to conduct research. The two advisers did, however, suggest several schools across the county which might be interested in taking part. These included schools with ethnic minorities, special needs children, nursery classes, those with home-school links, with family centres, both rural and urban, large and small.

There were several factors that I needed to consider:

- whether or not I wanted to make comparisons between schools;
- the distance that I was prepared to travel;
- schools which would work collaboratively;
- schools that were interested in the research;
- how many schools I wanted to take part; and
- how many differences and similarities I wanted.

It was important that the schools wanted to take part and collaborate in the research and that it was educative for everyone involved.

### **3.3.1. STUDY SAMPLE**

I made a short-list of eight schools. I decided to choose three schools as I could not be in all of them at the same time, which might be necessary

if they had their pre-entry visits on the same days. Neither would I have enough time to complete all the interviews in the time available. I identified two schools (which I shall call School A, and School B) as being of similar size (250 on roll) although one was a primary school the other an infant school, similar socio-economic areas, similar times for admitting children to school but with different induction policies (see Chapter 4.8 for details). This would form the basis for a comparison between two systems and types of school while keeping some variables similar. I needed a third school (School C) just in case one of the other two fell by the wayside. This one was an infant school with similar admission times but with fewer children (150 on roll) and with a different socio-economic background. All three schools had identified that induction was part of their School Development and wanted to work in co-operation. All three schools were within a five mile radius from where I live and were within three miles of each other. This had two advantages in that my travel time would be reduced and, when I was interviewing parents, I would be able to travel between the catchment areas relatively quickly. However, as we shall see later, the final analysis does not include examples from School C.

### **3.3.2. GAINING ACCESS**

I contacted the three schools in November 1993 and arranged to see the headteacher of each in order to seek their support. I discussed the research issues, the length of time that I would need access to the school, children and parents. Later we selected the initial group of children and their parents

from each school who would be starting school in September 1994. I assured the schools that the information would be confidential and that I would inform them of my general findings as each section of data gathering was completed. Throughout the research I adhered to the ethical code developed by the British Psychological Society (Robson 1993, pp.470-475).

At School A the headteacher had a well established induction policy but felt that it could be improved and had asked to have this looked at as part of her appraisal. At School B the headteacher considered that induction was better handled by one of the reception class teachers, and had appointed her as induction co-ordinator. She wanted to improve practice from an induction system that was developing. At School C the recently appointed headteacher thought that the research would help with their practice. The induction co-ordinator who would take over the role of induction co-ordinator fully the following year, was a recently appointed deputy headteacher who was one of the reception class teachers. He was beginning to establish an induction system in a growing school.

### **3.4. RESEARCH METHODS**

A range of methods were employed which I deemed the best way of gaining the detail that I needed, appropriate to the situations and to gathering peoples' perspectives. I used a questionnaire to gain an overview of the induction procedures of schools in the area. Interviews with children, parents and practitioners were used to gain their perceptions. Observations during the pre-entry meetings enabled me to see how the visits were conducted, watch how the children and parents reacted and listen to what was said.

I have also drawn on my research diary to inform my writing about timing of events and my thoughts along the way. I have included examples from this to illustrate points in my study.

#### **3.4.1. THE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE**

I decided to conduct a survey, by means of a postal questionnaire, of the other 26 Infant and Primary schools in the area in which the three schools were situated. I wanted to “to obtain information which can be analysed and patterns extracted and comparisons made” (Bell 1987, p.8). This would provide information to describe some of the existing features of admission and induction in the locality and give an overview of the schools in the area. My main emphasis was on fact finding as I wanted to use the information to set the scene for the reader by describing and comparing the practice in the area.

I wanted the survey to take place in the same year as my sample children would be starting school, as I would then have evidence of induction from the same time point. The questionnaire, therefore, was sent to schools in the autumn of 1994 which was the term when the first group of children began school. By using a questionnaire I was able to reach a large number of respondents relatively quickly.

All the infant and primary schools in the area, rather than a representative selection, were sent the questionnaire with the aim of collecting data that was “illuminative rather than generalizable” (Bell 1987, p.103).

#### 3.4.1.1. DESIGNING THE QUESTIONS

It was important to have concepts “operationalized” (McNeill 1990, p.26) before framing and drafting the questions. There were two questionnaires, one for headteachers and the other for reception class teachers (see Appendix 1). The aspects to be explored were:

1. Admission practices.
2. Pre-school settings.
3. Induction to school
  - a) before the children begin.
  - b) first few days.
  - c) role of other adults.

These areas were chosen because they are central to my study and would identify practice in the locality.

Schools receive so many questionnaires that they are often considered a nuisance (Nisbet and Entwistle, 1970), especially if they are loosely, ambiguously or inappropriately worded. Indeed, if the questions are too complex this might lead to a low response rate and subsequent bias. A further consideration was the amount of understanding that respondents might have of the admission and induction of new entrants starting school for, as McNeill (1990, p.27) states,

“questions must not presume that respondents have more knowledge than in fact they have . . . .”

I therefore, attempted to use language and expression which was accessible.

Although I had no control over the order in which questions would be answered, my next stage was to construct questions to deal with each aspect in turn, which would contribute clear information for analysis. As questionnaires are impersonal it was all the more important to take care over its construction. Since there was no interviewer to explain ambiguities or to check misunderstandings, the wording needed to be simple, clear and precise. As Nisbet and Entwistle state, “simplicity and brevity are cardinal virtues” (1970, p.47).

Bias in the questions needed to be eliminated although it is almost impossible to obtain completely neutral questions.

“Any form of question implies a certain frame of reference and thereby influences the answer given”

(Nisbet and Entwistle 1970, p.47).

Results would inevitably be biased had the questions given even a hint of the answer which was likely to be preferred or which led respondents towards a particular answer. One way of attempting to eliminate this was by piloting the questions (see section 3.4.1.3).

The questions also needed to avoid making the person feel inadequate in any way. Complex questions might have been answered superficially or not answered at all if a difficult choice was involved which showed the respondent in an unflattering light. Indeed, Nisbet and Entwistle (1970, p.45) suggest that

“people may throw away a questionnaire rather than risk showing themselves at a disadvantage”.

Another point, Oppenheim (1992) suggests, is that a ‘ghost interviewer’ is still present because the respondent may conjure up an image or a stereotype of the kind of person who might be asking the questions. However, because questionnaires are impersonal, it might mean that answers are more honest than in a face to face situation.

With closed, or multiple choice questions, the possible responses were limited and might not have expressed the response adequately that the respondent wished to give. As this might have cast doubt on the validity of the data collected I also used a multiple choice structure which included an option for an additional comment by including “other, please specify” at the



end of a multiple choice list. Open questions, on the other hand, made it possible for respondents to say what they really felt. With closed questions it was easier to count the replies and perform statistical operations on them, but it was difficult to get at what the respondent really thought about something.

Another consideration was the order of questions. Nisbet and Entwistle (1970) believe that a questionnaire should start with simple, factual questions, so that the respondent gets off to a good start. They suggest that complex or awkward topics should be positioned towards the end. Oppenheim (1992), on the other hand, believes that factual, personal data should be put at the end, as these questions tend to be off-putting to respondents if they are included at the beginning rather than answering questions on the topic of study. Bell (1987) recommends mixing the question content as, by switching between different question structures and topics, it encourages responses and holds the respondents' interest. I had four short sections to each questionnaire and started with factual questions in each section and then used a mixture of structures as some questions needed extending. For example, Question 6 on the questionnaire for Reception class teachers asks "Do children visit the classroom before they start school? YES/NO". However, I needed to know what happened if they did, so I included a follow-up question to explore this aspect. I also included an open-ended question at the end of the questionnaire to allow

respondents to express points which they thought were important, but which had not been covered in the questionnaire.

#### 3.4.1.2. THE LAYOUT

With a postal questionnaire it is important to check that the layout is neither confusing nor encouraging of any particular response (McNeill 1990, p.34).

I attempted to make the layout such that responses could be easily recorded and would assist transference of information for analysis.

Appearance is usually the first feature of the questionnaire to which the recipient reacts (Youngman, 1984). They need to be encouraged to read and to answer the questions, therefore the layout needs to invite them to participate. I attempted to leave sufficient space to complete the answer but not too much as this would inevitably lengthen the look of the questionnaire and thus might deter some respondents. I underlined the headings to indicate new sections and help to guide the respondent through the questions.

#### 3.4.1.3. PILOTING

Once the questions were provisionally drafted they were tested on a headteacher and reception class teacher similar to the sample to whom the questionnaire would finally be given. The purpose of the pilot exercise was to eliminate any flaws so that respondents in the main study would not

experience difficulties in completing it. For as Nisbet and Entwistle (1970, p.44) explain

“ . . . one single flaw in a questionnaire may provide the respondent with a justification for committing it to the waste-paper basket.”

The pilot gave me some indication that it would take about eight to ten minutes to complete. The instructions were clear but it showed up some flaws in the layout where I had not left sufficient room at question 7 of the headteacher's questionnaire, or anticipated that “perhaps” and “a little” might be required in answers to questions 8 and 9. It highlighted an ambiguity in the word “market” which might have caused difficulties in question 9. I therefore, put inverted commas round it and included the word “actively”. I wanted the questions to mean the same to each respondent as far as was possible. I also wanted the pilot to provide information about the feasibility of the proposed procedure for analysing the responses. However, when I came to analyse the responses from the final questionnaire, I realised that many of the questions lacked sufficient focus and did not give me as much information as I wanted.

#### 3.4.1.4. THE ACCOMPANYING LETTER

A covering letter in which the general theme of the questionnaire was made explicit accompanied the questionnaire (Appendix 2a). It indicated what would be done with the information provided which ensured that the respondents knew what they were committing themselves to, and also that they understood the context of their replies. The wording was important as

this was the means by which the sample were to be persuaded to co-operate. If the letter were to be too brusque or too ingratiating there may have been an adverse effect on the response.

The expense of including a stamped addressed envelope was justified by the notion that there would be more returns if respondents had this facility provided. It was sent on 7 November 1994 and asked to be returned by 25 November 1994. This gave two and a half weeks for completion, although Bell (1987) suggests that two weeks is a reasonable time for completion:

“Experience has shown that it is unwise to allow too long. . . it becomes too easy for subjects to put the questionnaire to one side, which often means that it will never be seen again.”

(Bell 1987, p.66)

An assurance of confidentiality was given, in the sense that only the researcher would have access to survey data and steps were taken to ensure that no information would be published about identifiable persons without their permission.

#### 3.4.1.5. RETURNS AND NON-RESPONSE

There was a confidential system of numbering in order to keep account of those who had replied and those who had not. Nisbet and Entwistle (1970) suggest that a response rate of about 70 per cent is acceptable as this will make it valid for general application. I received a 50% response by the date asked. A second attempt was made on 11 December 1994 to contact those

who had not replied (see Appendix 2b). As a result the overall response rose to 65%.

There was, inevitably, a proportion of the sample who did not answer, and it would be difficult to discover why, or to discover how the non-responders differ from those who did reply. It would have been useful to have found out whether the reasons for the non-response were somehow connected with the topic of research for, as Moser and Kalton (1971, p.267) point out

“non-response is a problem because of the likelihood - repeatedly confirmed in practice - that people who do not return questionnaires differ from those who do.”

I made some attempt to estimate the opinions of non-responders in order to find out how far those who have replied were representative of the whole group by looking to see which schools had not replied. However, this gave limited suggestions as to the nature of the bias introduced by incomplete returns. For example, it gave a vague indication of the ‘stage’ that a school was at because the headteacher of those schools was either new, retiring or closing their school.

Added to the problem of questionnaires not being returned, there were various other types of non-response such as questions refused and pages missed. I did not know, either, if the questionnaires had been completed by those to whom they were addressed.

Although the percentage response is the most important single consideration in evaluating a questionnaire (Nisbet and Entwistle, 1970), responses were treated with caution for, as McNeill (1990, p.47) suggests

“There is no guarantee that what people say . . . is a true account of what they actually do, whether they are intentionally lying or whether they genuinely believe what they are saying. People are quite capable of saying one thing and doing another, and of being quite unaware of this.”

Written responses also conceal information such as tone of voice, facial expression or hesitation. Fundamentally, as Nisbet and Entwistle (1970, p.53) state “questionnaires show what people say, not what they do or are.”

As a method of gathering data for my research it gave me an overview of the schools which was what I wanted but, due to the nature of questionnaires, it did not give me the detail of people’s perspectives because I was unable to probe further where necessary.

Once the results were analysed, those schools which had participated in the investigation and asked for feedback were given a brief summary of the findings.

### **3.4.2. THE INTERVIEWS**

Interviews were used as my principal means of gathering information.

“By providing access to what is “inside a person’s head”, [it] makes it possible to measure what a person knows (knowledge or information), what a person likes or dislikes

(values and preferences), and what a person thinks (attitudes and beliefs).”

(Tuckman 1972, p.243)

As I wanted to gather people's perceptions and needed, on occasion, to probe further I used semi-structured interviews. This type of interview allowed depth to be achieved by providing me with the opportunity to ask key questions and then to investigate feelings and motives through further questioning. This helped respondents to say what they thought and describe what they had done with “greater richness and spontaneity” (Oppenheim, 1992). There was, however, the danger of over-probing as this may have put answers into respondents' heads (McNeill 1990, p.26). They may also have felt that they had to give me the kind of answers it was assumed I wanted. Borg and Meredith (1983) argue that the semi-structured interview provides a “desirable combination of objectivity and depth” which permits gathering valuable data that could not be obtained successfully by any other approach. While the semi-structured interview allowed respondents to express themselves at some length, it also offered enough shape to prevent aimless rambling, yet provided some kind of balance in which there was room for “negotiation, discussion and expansion . . .” (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989).

Often at the end of an interview, as I was packing up my papers, it would turn into an unstructured interview as a result of a question that the respondent had asked or an observation that I made. This raises the issue of whether or not this “black market” record (Powney and Watts 1987, p.192)

should be used. There was only one time that I felt that an off-guard comment should not be used. This was a comment made by a teacher.

The flexibility, adaptability and human interaction that are the unique strengths of the interview can also be its greatest weakness. The fact that I was directly involved with individuals meant that the interview was a highly subjective technique and my presence will have had some kind of influence on the data.

#### 3.4.2.1. THE SAMPLE: SELECTING INTERVIEWEES

I wanted to follow a group of children and their parents from each of the three intakes (September 1994, January 1995 and April 1995) in each of the three schools before the children started school and, 50% of those, at various stages throughout Key Stage One. The interview programme comprised interviewing:

- before starting the induction sessions (May 1994, October 1994, April 1995)
- after having been at school for six weeks (October 1994, February 1995, May 1995)
- at the end of their first term in school (December 1994, April 1995, July 1995) [children only]

and 50% of these at:

- the end of the Reception year (July 1995)
- six weeks after the beginning of Year One (October 1995) [parents only]
- the end of Year One (July 1996)
- six weeks after the beginning of Year Two (October 1996)
- the end of Year Two (July 1997)



The reason I collected data at these times was that these were key times and stages in the children's school lives with regard to induction and transitions.

I planned to select ten children from each school from each intake, making thirty from each school, ninety altogether. Although this would initially make a large group, I anticipated that several would 'fall by the wayside' and that I would probably end up with twenty from each school. As we shall see later I eventually tracked fifty children and their parents through their induction and twenty-four throughout Key Stage One at two schools (twelve in each). Percentages quoted in the research do not include the children, parents or practitioners from School C, nor was any data from School C used to inform the analysis.

Interview schedules for the children's interviews can be found in Appendix 4; the parents' interview schedules in Appendix 5; and practitioners' interview schedules in Appendices 6, 7 and 8.

I interviewed one of the playgroup leaders, the children's teachers and the respective co-ordinator at each school and observed the induction procedures. The observations of the induction procedures are addressed in section 3.4.4.

“Sampling is a problem throughout educational research. A single or a few respondents may be atypical, and a cast of thousands may be equally unrepresentative if badly selected.”

(Wragg 1984, p.179)

As a researcher, I am dependent on the good will and availability of subjects, therefore it was likely to be difficult for me to achieve a true random sample. However, efforts were made to select as representative a sample of children and their parents as was possible. The choice was between a random sample, which gave everyone an equal chance, for example every fourth child on the register; an opportunity sample such as those whom it was convenient to interview; and a stratified random sample which used criteria to specify in advance the sub-group of the sample which might be important. The schools and I selected a stratified sample comprising, as far as was possible, equal numbers of boys and girls, new families to the schools and those with a child or children already at the school. Thus, the parents were chosen as a result of the criteria attached to the children. As those selected may not have been willing to be interviewed, or in case anyone dropped out, a reserve list for each school was prepared. This proved invaluable with the spring term intake at School A as six parents on the original list were unable to take part.

After the sample was selected each family was contacted by letter (Appendix 3a). Before the letter was sent I asked each school to look at it to see that it met with their approval as it was going to prospective parents.

The letter changed slightly with each intake becoming much briefer and more accessible (see Appendices 3b and 3c).

At School A the headteacher invited the autumn intake selection to school as a group, to meet me and hear about the amount of commitment of co-operation that was needed before the interviewing started. It was also important to explain to each respondent how they came to be selected for the sample and why it was important that he or she, rather than someone else, took part (Oppenheim 1992, p.82). At School B the induction co-ordinator knew the majority of parents and children who were about to start school and she talked to each family. At School C contact was made by letter only, but the response was disappointing. There were only five positive responses. After another letter was sent there was one further response. The sample was selected in a similar fashion for the spring and summer terms, although School C was not involved during the summer intake.

The practitioners were not chosen at random other than they happened to be the co-ordinator or teacher of those classes at the focus schools. I interviewed those teaching staff involved as my sample progressed through the school. I also interviewed a playgroup leader from the one playgroup which had contact with a school, as I wanted to gain an impression of any preparations that the children might be given before visiting school.

### 3.4.2.2. THE SEQUENCE OF INTERVIEWS WITH ADULTS

As can be seen from section 3.4.2.1, there were times during 1994 and 1995 when I was interviewing parents and children who were about to begin their induction sessions in the same period as I was interviewing parents and children who had been at school for six weeks. This section addresses the sequence of interviews with adults while section 3.4.3 explores the interviews with children.

I will start with the first group of parents. I telephoned the twenty-six parents of the September 1994 intake that had been selected and arranged a date which was convenient to them and their child, for interview, before the induction visits started at the school during the summer of 1994.

In October I interviewed those parents whose children had started school in September 1994. During the autumn term the co-ordinators and I selected another group to be interviewed who would be starting school in January. This time there were a number of problems in gaining as many families as I would have liked because there were fewer children in the intakes. Another problem was that, although the letter going to parents was very much a joint letter from the school and myself, I was concerned about the ethics of being given the addresses of parents at school C before they had been approached by the head or the new induction co-ordinator. In my research diary I have written

“27.11.94: I raised an ethical issue with School C about the information that parents give to school. C has obviously gone away and thought about this as he phoned me this

evening about sending letters to parents. He has recently taken over the induction programme and hadn't realised that the letter going to parents was a joint letter. My fault, I should have kept him informed. What I was trying to do was take on two roles (teacher and researcher) at the same time - bad move. I've opened a hornets' nest instead!"

I spoke with the head the following day and suggested that we all get together and talk through the problem. I wrote in my diary later that day

"28.11.94: I feel really bad that I've unwittingly upset them. Perhaps it was because C didn't want me talking to the parents of the new children in-depth before he did? Is he looking for an excuse to end the research?"

School C opened their nursery on 14 November 1994. I was invited to visit and welcomed as a valued colleague. By the beginning of December relationships were on an even keel once more. The children who were starting school in January 1995 attended the nursery for a month before Christmas which meant that, in effect, they had started school. As a result of this and the fact that on 6.12.94 I felt that "C is obviously not happy about me invading his 'territory' . . ." I decided that I would only continue with Schools A and B and withdrew from School C. There were eight children and their parents from School A and five from School B whom I interviewed before the induction visits started.

The following term I selected, together with the induction co-ordinators, a further group to make the numbers to twenty-five from each school. This comprised seven from School A and ten from School B.

At the end of the summer term, 1995, we narrowed the sample to twelve from each school in order to make the sample more manageable. This resulted in four from each cohort, two boys and two girls and their parents to follow through the transitions that the children would make until the end of Key Stage One. Although I would have liked to have followed one boy and one girl with an older sibling, and one without in each cohort, this was not possible at School B and the end result was:

<b>School A:</b>	
<b>September 1994 Intake</b>	
Boy with older brother	Girl with older brother
Boy without older sibling	Girl without siblings
<b>January 1995 Intake</b>	
Boy with older brothers and sisters	Girl with older sister
Boy without older sibling	Girl without older siblings
<b>April 1995 Intake</b>	
Boy with older sister	Girl with older brother
Boy without older siblings	Girl without older siblings

<b>School B</b>	
<b>September 1994 Intake</b>	
Boy with older brother	Girl with older sister
Boy without siblings	Girl without older siblings
<b>January 1995 Intake</b>	
Boy with older brother	
Boy with older brother	
Boy without older siblings	Girl without older siblings
<b>April 1995 Intake</b>	
	Girl with older brothers and sisters
	Girl with older sister
Boy without any older siblings	Girl without any siblings

This was broadly representative of the children in each class. The other parents and children were thanked for their co-operation and were not

included in any further samples. The interviews then followed the pattern as outlined in section 3.4.2.

#### 3.4.2.3. CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEWS

People who agree to be interviewed deserve some consideration regarding time and place. The environment is a most important part of our daily lives.

“Even professional people, used to meeting officials, attending meetings, using telephones, feel on their guard when interviewed in an office with the questioner behind a desk.”

(Wragg 1984, p.179)

Oppenheim (1992) recommends avoiding settings that may be perceived as unpleasant or threatening by respondents. Therefore, the setting should be private, quiet and comfortable with some thought given to the positioning of furniture. Everything should be done to create a comfortable, relaxed setting.

Some parents preferred to meet and talk at school but the majority (91%) invited me into their homes for the first interview. This rose to 96% for subsequent interviews. If I met them at school I was able to arrange the furniture. In their homes, when invited to sit down, if possible I chose a chair that was slightly facing them. I often interviewed to a background of babies crying, dogs barking or parrot's singing, with a cat on my lap or a dog resting its head on my foot! I also drank gallons of tea and coffee as I was welcomed to the house as a guest on the first visit and all the rites of passage that that involved, and as an old friend after the first interview.

I interviewed the practitioners either at school or in their homes. At School A all the interviews took place at school either in the staff room or the teacher's own classroom. Those with the headteacher took place in her office. On two occasions I interviewed the four teachers as a group as the headteacher was conscious not to increase pressures on her staff and suggested that I talked to them during assembly time. At first the group of four staff were wary of putting their point of view first, however, as they relaxed a variety of view points were expressed.

Privacy is also important. Few people will be frank if they are within earshot of an 'audience'. If parents were interviewed in the school I ensured that the interview took place away from other parents, children and teachers. I was trying to achieve a situation where the respondents went away

“with a vague feeling of pleasure at having been of help . . . they should never go away angry or upset, or feel that they have been the subject of a painful inquisition.”

(Oppenheim 1992, p.69)

Since it is fairly difficult to conduct an interview properly in a short time, an hour was allowed for each of the initial interviews with parents. When the appointment was made I made it clear how long it would take and kept to this time. Parents who are shift workers are not always accessible at times when other workers can be found at home, so I interviewed at various times of the day and evening or at weekends. Essentially, whenever it was



convenient for the families. This caused surprise from some who could not understand why I worked during weekends and evenings.

Managing my time so that I have enough time to travel between houses was also important. This improved over the years as I got to know people and how talkative they were and knowing where they lived helped me to 'group' the interviews in areas as much as possible. With subsequent interviews I telephoned and made appointments, again telling them the length of time needed. They averaged between half an hour and three-quarters of an hour.

The timing of the initial interviews was critical as they were supplementary to the observations and needed to be conducted before the children started the pre-entry visits. If they were left until after the visits had started, important changes would already have been under way. Frailty of human memory meant that with subsequent interviews, the interviewees needed to be interviewed as close to events as possible.

Respondents were assured that all their statements would be held in strictest confidence and used for research purposes only.

One further consideration was that

"one needs, in particular, to bear in mind that the interview itself can exert quite a significant influence on events."  
(Wragg 1984, p.181)

Certainly it raised awareness and all the parents said that they had found the research helpful. There were comments such as “it gave me an opportunity to verbalise and think” (parent BJ1), “you don’t normally bother to tell anyone” (parent BS7) and “it was nice to talk about it and focus on it in a way I hadn’t thought about” (parent AJ4).

The research also had an impact on practice at the two schools. The changes that came about are considered in Chapter 4.8.

#### 3.4.2.4. THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

In drawing up the interview schedules it was first necessary to make a list of the areas in which I required information. These aspects were related to my research questions and built on previous interviews. These were then translated into actual questions and probes. I gave some thought to the format and the possible responses and included both open and closed questions. (See Appendices 4-8 for the interview schedules.) The data analysis was also considered alongside the response mode as I wanted to be confident that the data would serve its purpose.

As each interview schedule for parents and children was drafted I shared it with the induction co-ordinators. In this way the research was conducted as a partnership. Sometimes the questions were modified. For example, the co-ordinator at School A was particularly interested in whether or not the time of day for the initial meeting suited parents’ needs. I therefore added

Question 10 to the end of Reception Year interviews which asked about the time of day and the timing during the term for the first pre-entry visit.

After the schedules were assembled they were piloted. Borg and Meredith (1983, p.454) advise the researcher “. . . to place himself in the role of the respondent . . .” in order to identify elements which need altering. It was tried with some typical respondents. This helped me to see whether the planned procedures produced the data desired, detected bias and flaws in the design and helped to evaluate the interview procedure. This usually resulted in minor changes to the interview schedules. However, with the interviews that took place with parents after their children had been in school for six weeks I needed to make major changes to the question order. I moved the last section, which at that time was about ‘settling in’, to the beginning as I found that this was a good opening and parents wanted to tell me about this before anything else.

Bell (1987) considers that, the question wording is important. To reduce bias questions needed to be formulated so that the meaning was clear. Questions were phrased to elicit relevant information and not lead the respondent “in a certain consciously or unconsciously desired direction.” (Wragg 1984, p.177). To reduce these errors Borg and Meredith (1983) advise that

“ . . . the researcher should carefully study his target population, try to identify predispositions that are likely to be present, and then design his study so as to eliminate or minimize their effect.” (Borg and Meredith 1983, p.438)

However, even a watertight schedule could not totally excise the kind of bias inherent in tone of voice, gesture and facial expression and non-verbal communication.

All respondents were exposed to the same interview questions although they were sometimes delivered in a different order if the conversation took a different route. Oppenheim (1992) stipulates that interviewers need to be flexible to make the question mean the same for each respondent.

Clear communication is vital, therefore I attempted to frame the questions in language that ensured that the respondents had understood the questions. I was aware that many of the meanings which were clear to one person might have been relatively muddy to another, even though the intention was genuine communication. Borg and Meredith (1983) counsel that words recall different shades of meaning for each person.

Unless a common ground for communication was established these differences might have seriously interfered with the communication process of the interview. I sometimes repeated a question using different phrases or words if I could see there was confusion. This often happened with the word 'induction' so eventually I used the word 'visits' instead, particularly when interviewing parents. Oppenheim (1992) also suggests that the first few questions should be spoken quite slowly to help the respondent become used to the interviewer's voice. During the interview I summarised or read

back sections in order to clarify that I had understood and for the interviewees to know that I had heard what they had said.

#### 3.4.2.5. RECORDING THE DATA

One aspect that needed to be considered was a method of recording the replies. Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) put forward three possibilities

“(1) tape record the whole of the researcher - respondent exchanges, (2) take notes verbatim as the interview is happening, or (3) write up the main features and exchanges of the interview at some point after the interview is completed.”

(Hitchcock and Hughes 1989, p.94)

I chose not to write up after the interview because I may have forgotten important details, or have noted features which were not even in the interview as I was often conducting one after the other. Therefore, there would have been a risk of making errors and introducing distortions.

On balance it seemed that the use of a tape recorder used in conjunction with note taking was the method that was most suitable for recording interviews with adults. The principal disadvantage of using a tape recorder is that the presence of the machine changes the interview situation to some degree and the respondents may be reluctant to express their feelings freely. A further problem is the length of time that it takes to transcribe the interview. Bell (1987) proposes ten hours for each half hour recorded. Tape recordings can, however, be useful to check the wording of any statement

that is to be quoted and to check that notes are accurate. Borg and Meredith (1983, p.446) observe that it is also possible

“ . . . to reanalyze the taped interview data to test hypotheses not set up in the original study.”

It is possible that note-taking introduces as much formality as the presence of a tape recorder because the respondent may feel self-conscious if the interviewer is writing down everything that is said and this may disrupt the effectiveness of the communication between interviewer and respondent.

In the event I did not use the tape recorder as I felt that it would inhibit participants and I would have had several hours of interview data that I would not have time to transcribe. Instead I took notes, attempting to jot down everything that was said, and became quite adept at writing quickly, although I felt that eye contact was sometimes lost as a result. However, when interviewing children, I tape recorded some of the interviews (see the next section).

### **3.4.3. INTERVIEWING YOUNG CHILDREN**

“ . . . there is now increasing recognition and acceptance that children’s views and perspectives need to be heard both as an ethical imperative and also as a matter of practical utility and efficacy.”

(Davie and Galloway 1996, p.3)

I have included a separate section about the interviews that I conducted with the children because gathering data from children can be very different

from gathering data from adults. It was important to reflect their views because they are experts when it comes to their own lives. There is value in listening to children as they might see things that others miss. They might also gain a sense of ownership for any decision-making that takes place and an understanding that their views are regarded with respect (Davie and Galloway 1996, p.13). There is gain for the researcher too, because

“by listening to their views we extend our knowledge of  
*their* perceptions of those experiences”

(Charlton 1996, p.50).

One can seldom, however, gather information by conventional methods when working with very young children. Questionnaires or structured interviews are possible with older children but a more practicable method is needed for four year olds (Malek 1995, p.4), especially if they are not used to talking with adults or strangers.

A number of problems may arise when attempting to gain data from young children. In an adult's presence they may:

- feel intimidated by the interview situation. Indeed, small children may not communicate at all unless they are in the company of their parents or friends (Wragg, 1984);
- be shy, embarrassed or show off, particularly if they are being interviewed in the presence of their parents;
- look for confirmation that they have given the 'right' answer or they may give 'silly' answers; and
- say what they think the interviewer wants to hear and not what they really think.

Their stage of development may lead them to:

- have an inability to express their thoughts and feelings in detail due to a lack of language;
- be unable to describe their reality as they may not yet have grasped the relationship between truth and words. This may lead to unreliability;
- be unable to reflect beyond the immediate; and
- only have developed affective impressions rather than opinions.

Problems on the part of the interviewer may be:

- over- or under-estimating the child's intellectual level (Powney and Watts 1987, p.21);
- bringing adult concepts to bear on the understanding of children's thoughts and actions;
- premature intervention rather than giving children time to consider their answers; and
- accepting children's thoughts and statements as autonomous and complete in themselves, although this raises the issue of how much to accept at face value.

As a result of these I needed to empathise with the children and be aware of the bias that my own behaviour may bring about.

#### 3.4.3.1. ETHICAL ISSUES

When gathering data, I accorded children the same respect and dignity as I did their parents, treated their views seriously and encouraged them to talk without putting pressure on them. There are power relationships between the researcher and the researched in that children are not always able to say 'no' to adults as they may have been 'trained' to do as they are told without question. I reassured the children that they did not have to answer. Indeed, there were a few who did not want to talk at all.



Robson (1993, p.32) raises the issue of whether a ‘captive population’ such as children can “rationally, knowingly, and freely give informed consent”. When I asked parents for their consent to talk to their child I felt that it was still important to ask the child too, and to establish whether or not their words could be used. This in itself raises questions of whether children have an understanding of what this means and implies, as well as the complex issue of data ownership.

There is also the difficulty of

“eliciting a child’s view without encouraging her/him to believe that this view will prevail or that it is necessarily valid.”

(Davie and Galloway 1996, p.13)

Although children need to be involved in the process it is not always practicable to take note of their view and implement it. However, it is important that the child feels his/her views are treated seriously and on those occasions when their ideas are implemented, children need to be asked if they want to be identified. A further problem was one of confidentiality which arose if the child’s parents or teachers asked me what the children had said. I asked the children at the end of each interview that took place at school “can I tell mummy/daddy or your teacher what you’ve said?” I was aware that this may put pressure on the child if they wanted to be honest with me, yet felt they could not be open if they knew that a particular aspect would be reported back to their parents or teacher. There

was only one occasion when a child said “but don’t tell mummy that bit” because he thought that his mother would not like me to know. In the event his mother also mentioned the same incident to me.

#### 3.4.3.2. THE SEQUENCE OF INTERVIEWS

I was seeking children’s perceptions about the induction and transition to school and needed practicable methods of gaining information about their views on seven occasions:

1. With their parents before they started school;
2. Individually at school after they had attended school for half a term;
3. Individually, in their classroom at the end of their first term at school;
4. Either individually or in pairs, at school, at the end of the reception year;
5. Individually, at school, at the end of Year One;
6. Individually, at school, at the start of Year Two;
7. In groups of four, at school, at the end of Year Two. One was interviewed at home because he was absent from school on the day that I was there.

The interview schedules were subjected to the same piloting rigours as the adult interview schedules. (Appendix 4 contains the schedules for interviews with children.)

#### 3.4.3.2.1. THE INITIAL INTERVIEWS

When talking to children it is often their answers that determine the next question (Powney and Watts, 1987) so I needed to be clear about what it was that I wanted to ask the children but flexible in the route that I took through the key aspects. In the first interview these were:

1. Their notions of what a teacher does.
2. What they thought happened in the classroom/at school.
3. Their feelings about starting school.
4. The purpose of school.

A vehicle, other than conventional interview methods, was needed to elicit the voices of children in order to gain their views and understand their feelings about the nature and significance of the transition. One method was to use photographs of school to focus the interview.

I started by photographing children who were already at school in a range of situations and selecting photographs that were clear and which were 'typical' of a Reception classroom. The number of photographs I was to show the children was important as I wanted to get a balance between giving an impression of a day in school, yet not have so many that the child would lose interest. Eventually I chose thirty-one photographs and put them in a sturdy twenty-page album with laminated pages (Appendix 4a).

I needed to gain the child's perceptions of how they envisaged school, but first I had to set the scene. 9% of the first interviews took place at school which was a new environment for the child. For the others, I was aware that at this stage I was a stranger in their home and that it was necessary to create conditions as quickly as possible that would help the child to feel comfortable and confident in my presence (Powney and Watts, 1987). I took along a play-pack that included books, a cuddly toy, a puppet, a drawing block and crayons. While I was interviewing their parent(s) the child was able to play with these whilst also becoming accustomed to what I looked and sounded like. When it came to the time to talk with the child I either sat with them on the floor or sat next to them on a settee. The seating arrangement was important in order to be on the same level. Using their name, eye contact and smiling were important in creating a trusting climate (Powney and Watts 1987, p.97). I told each child that I wanted to find out what they thought their school was going to be like because their view was important. I asked permission of them and their parents to tape record what they said and played it back to them afterwards if they wanted to hear the recording.

I wondered if I would get an honest response with the parent(s) present but I also felt that it was ethically correct to have them there. Occasionally a child would look to them for confirmation that their answer was acceptable but more often than not they would be engrossed in the photographs and

ignore their parent(s). I found that most parents, too, wanted to see the photographs and gain an insight into school.

That children do not know 'the rules' of an interview situation became clear with one or two in that, as with many young children, their conversation went off at a tangent or they wanted to show me a particular toy which had no bearing on the topic in hand.

I started by asking the child if they knew of anyone else who was starting school with them and what they already knew about it. A focus was needed so I asked them to draw a picture of what they thought their teacher would look like. While they were drawing I asked what they thought a teacher does and what they thought s/he would be like. (For those children who did not want to draw, the first photograph in the album was of a teacher.) I asked what they thought their classroom might look like, and have in it, and what they thought happened at school. This was a difficult concept for young children so I explained that I had some photographs for them to look at, of girls and boys at school. I used the photographs taken of classroom situations to ask "do you think you might be doing this when you go to school?". This gave a focus but did not always elicit the information I needed. I had deliberately left some pages blank and after they had looked at all the photographs, asked what activities they thought might be missing. This was a successful ploy as several children identified a number of areas

that I had deliberately omitted such as listening to a story, painting and sand-play. I then asked what they were looking forward to most about school, how they felt about going and why they were going to go.

#### 3.4.3.2.2. THE SECOND AND THIRD INTERVIEWS

The next two interviews with the children took place at school and were semi-structured but without photographs. Building relationships takes time, but it was important if I was going to get relevant information. Remembering the children's names and something special about them, for example asking about their pet, helped to re-establish the relationship. The children remembered having talked with me at their homes but now the setting was different and this might have affected their interpretation of significant aspects of reality and understanding of experiences. They were now *in* the situation rather than looking towards the event. A further consideration was that their ability to discuss may be affected by the style of teaching experienced, whether they were used to discussing and negotiating or if they were told what to do. Added to this was whether or not parents and professionals encouraged children to talk about themselves and their feelings.

After half a term I interviewed the children about:

1. How they know what to do at school.
2. Knowing about not knowing.
3. How they learnt the systems/language of the classroom.
4. What importance/value they put on school.

After a term I interviewed the children about:

1. The importance they put on friendships.
2. Their understanding of acceptable behaviour at school.
3. Their notions of teaching and learning.
4. Their feelings about being at school.

These issues were selected from reading the relevant literature, talking to staff and as a result of analysing the previous questions. The questions were on a single side of A4 paper with spaces for me to note down answers. I wrote in pencil. I interviewed the children individually, although there were often others nearby. I sat next to them at a desk or on the floor and reminded them that I had talked with them before, although they remembered me and the photograph album. I said that I would like to talk to them again and to ask them some questions about school.

#### 3.4.3.2.3. THE END OF RECEPTION YEAR INTERVIEWS

Since the first interviews I had been pondering the notion of linking questions with photographs, so when it came to the interviews at the end of the Reception Year I decided to try this style of interview. I wanted to find out about the children's:

1. Levels of confidence and how well they had settled.
2. Gained sociability (friendships).
3. Ability to make sense of school and become effective learners.
4. Perceptions of the home/school partnership.
5. Thoughts about the approaching transition from the Reception Year to Year One.

I used a different set of photographs and displayed them in a similar album to that used with the first interviews (see Appendix 4d) but this time I matched specific questions with particular photographs.

Photographs as a visual stimulus certainly gave a focus to the interviews and kept the children's attention. They also 'freeze' time and this helped to identify particular issues that I wanted to discuss. The number of photographs used needed careful consideration: Too many and the children would have lost interest, too few and not enough information would have been gleaned.

In the first interviews the photographs were in an album with one picture per page and with some blank pages. The thickness of the album gave them an indication of the number but this also made some of them hurry through the final pictures as if it were a race to finish. I had considered using them individually or scattered on a surface, in which case I would have mounted them onto card and covered them, otherwise they would have become damaged very quickly with the number of children using them. However, I decided to use an album once more.

Time needs to be considered when interviewing children. Nutbrown (1996, p.53) reminds us that "children have their own pace" and that "we need to be mindful of the need young children have to take their time". This is an



important factor if I was to gain considered information, yet at the same time there was the dilemma of using time that had been allocated to school and children's learning. My second album of photographs and interviews took nearly twenty minutes to complete which was too long as some children were unable to concentrate for this length of time.

I found that children were best interviewed in twos. Being with a friend was less threatening and more comfortable for many children. Interviewing two children together worked well as they discussed their thoughts and could 'bounce' ideas off one another, although with some children they simply gave the same reply as their friend. Techniques to avoid this included asking "I'd like you each to tell me . . . ." or "I'll ask A first and then B". There were difficulties in recording both children's answers at the same time but the gains of interviewing in pairs were sufficient to outweigh this problem. The interviews needed to be tape recorded to help gain all the information offered and give the children a sense that their comments were valued. However, the recorded results were not always audible and I was pleased that I had written their answers as well. I also checked that I had understood what they wanted me to hear by paraphrasing their answers at the end of the interview.

Photographs were helpful in building relationships as, on later occasions, children associated me with photographs and asked if I had brought any, because they had enjoyed looking at them. They indicated that they could

associate with the discussion more easily and that photographs helped them in their thinking and in forming opinions.

One of the problems with using photographs is that eye contact is lost. However, this is not always a bad thing as ‘parallel talk’ while looking at photographs or drawing a picture encouraged the children to talk about issues of concern and helped some children to raise questions about particular aspects of school. For example, in the first album the photograph of children taking off their clothes for PE caused children to ask me what they were doing.

#### 3.4.3.2.4. THE FINAL THREE INTERVIEWS

The next interviews were exploring perceptions about the transitions that the children made through KS1. At the beginning of the final interview I wanted the children to reflect on the ways in which they had changed during their time at school. I asked them to draw the physical changes that had taken place and I used this as a starting point for discussing other changes that had happened. I had considered using a computer programme for the drawing but as it may have been difficult to gain access to a computer at the schools, the children drew with crayons on paper.

#### **3.4.4. OBSERVING THE INDUCTION**

I conducted observations during the pre-entry meetings. At School A these started on 10.05.94, School B on 28.06.94 and School C on 24.06.94. The

observations were made in order to watch the actions and behaviour of people involved in the study and to see the systems of induction.

I observed the visits with parents, parents with their children and children with other children. I looked for content issues such as the information that parents were given about the school, its organisation and the curriculum. I listened for questions that parents asked of the staff. I also looked for process issues such as the way the children were introduced to the classroom culture, the way in which parents and children were separated and any support they were given. However, much of what I looked for was intuitive. As Wolcott (1994, p.160) states

“if a researcher knows exactly what information is wanted (i.e. knows exactly what to look for), then ethnography is one of the least efficient ways to gather data.”

According to Woods (1986, p.36) the researcher is

“... ideally, not part of these proceedings, and adopts ‘fly on the wall’ techniques to observe things as they happen, naturally, as undisturbed by his/her presence as possible.”

However, Robson (1993, p.197) suggests an alternative is the “participant as observer role”. I attempted to adopt this strategy when observing children because in this role

“children commonly view you as something akin to a teacher. They are then not surprised to be quizzed by you on any and every aspect of their school life”

(Robson 1993, p.197)

I gave further thought to my own “observability” (Woods 1986, p.40) when observing parents or parents with their children. An observer can

never pass entirely unnoticed, but I could aim to be as unobtrusive as possible and blend in with the surroundings. I therefore sat with the group of parents. I was introduced to parents at School A during the initial meeting. At the other two schools I was not introduced. After the initial meeting several parents at School C must have thought that I was a member of staff because they asked me questions about staff names and procedures.

I aimed to disturb the action as little as possible by my own presence and tried to be as inconspicuous as possible. One of the problems with this, however, was that it is difficult not to have an effect on the situation under observation for, although I did not 'belong' to the group I had interviewed several of them the previous week. My research journal reads:

"28.06.94 (School B): I was not introduced but several people that I had interviewed remarked on my presence or acknowledged that I was there with a hello or how are you?"

Thus I was accepted by the group.

A further problem was that it was also difficult to avoid becoming involved with the life of the school. The co-ordinators looked upon me as a source of information about ways to improve their induction process. Staff invited me to nativity plays, Easter Bonnet Parades and other school events.

"One is marginal, an outsider looking in, and all such positions are fraught with feelings of anxiety and alienation, of being betwixt and between, neither here nor there. The life of the school goes on, people hustle and bustle about their business, and in this activity, you are of no consequence. In fact, they would probably be better off

without you. . . . you are totally dependent on them for what you are doing, and they are totally independent of you. In such circumstances, as guest, visitor, suppliant, one must behave with tact, discretion and decorum, and flawless recognition of proprieties at all times.”

(Woods 1986, p 56)

#### 3.4.4.1. RECORDING OBSERVATIONS

“The main requirements for observation, unsurprisingly, are a sharp eye, a keen ear and a sound memory . . . . There is no substitute for what the researcher sees, hears, and experiences in person.”

(Woods 1986, p.40)

However, I could not physically observe and record everything, so certain decisions had to be made about what and how to record. Filming, photographs and tape recordings were possibilities but I considered that these would be too intrusive, therefore I made notes in a notebook in which I described the action taking place and wrote the words spoken by the speakers. However, this was not without its drawbacks. This method may well put people off as

“ . . . to see someone making notes on what they do . . . may make them feel they are being spied on, or evaluated in some way”

(Woods 1986, p.44)

I also had to make the decision at School B as to which group to observe during the first meeting as the children were taken to the classroom while the parents had an introductory talk in the school hall.

Bell (1987, p.99) counsels that the task is not complete even when the observations have taken place and the records have been made because it is

essential to view the event as a whole as soon after as possible in order to “  
... place what you see in its organizational and/or curricular context. . .”

In order to check reliability I summarised my observations and asked parents and co-ordinators about their perception of the accuracy of my account.

### **3.4.5. VALIDITY OF THE RESEARCH**

When dealing with qualitative data and systematic enquiry into humans and their ways there is potential for bias and the pitfalls of representativeness being assumed because there are

“tendencies for over-reliance on accessible informants (informants may therefore be nonrepresentative); on accessible events (which may well be nonrepresentative); and on plausible explanations (inferences may be drawn from nonrepresentative processes).”

(Robson 1993, pp.402-3).

In order to overcome this Lincoln and Guba (1985, in Robson 1993, p.403) suggest that credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability need to be considered.

I consider that I invested sufficient time to learn the culture of each school, build trust and “identify those aspects of a situation that are most relevant to the issues involved” (Robson, p.404). Triangulation, by collecting evidence from different sources, potentially increases the credibility of my data and consequently, the analysis. Exposing my analysis to colleagues and

participants assisted “in the development of both the design and analysis of the study” (Robson 1993 , p.404).

I consider that I have provided sufficient information and “thick description” (Geertz, 1973 in Robson 1993, p.405) to enable the reader to know and understand the findings and thus make judgements about its transferability.

In order to obtain dependability I have given a clear description of the systematic processes that I used and have documented them to enable the reader to conduct an audit trail. I was aware of interviewer bias in the form of age, gender, class and ethnicity (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989). I interviewed with an open mind as I was also aware that there is

“ . . . a tendency for the interviewer to seek answers that support his preconceived notions . . . .”  
(Cohen and Manion 1985, p.252)

I have endeavoured to give sufficient and comprehensible information for the reader to assess whether the findings “flow from the data” (Robson 1993, p.406) and are thus confirmable.

### **3.5. RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARTICIPANTS**

To set the research in a broader context I will take a few moments to explore some of the relationships between the researcher and the researched. The outcome of the interviews was, to a certain extent, dependent upon the relationship and interaction between myself and the interviewees. Even before I started asking questions it was important that the participants knew something about me if I was to gain their trust. It was also important that they understood what would happen to the information that they were about to give. This would be likely to give them confidence in the research and in my ability as a researcher.

“We are likely to go further in our confidences when we trust the interviewer or observer not to betray our confidences. We are also likely to be more forthcoming when we think that our information is going to make an improvement in human lives, in education in general if not in our own classroom or school.”

(Powney and Watts 1987, p.40).

#### **3.5.1. RELATIONSHIPS WITH PRACTITIONERS**

The staff at School A were rather suspicious of me at first. The background to the research had been presented to them by the headteacher and initially I was treated as an outsider, as if I was ‘on the headteacher’s side’ rather than working collaboratively with all the staff. Yet a question concerning constraints on the improvement of the induction programme was taken as a criticism of the headteacher and they leaped to her defence. It took me a while to realise that the ‘prickliness’ had been caused because it was the headteacher, rather than myself who had explained the research, they felt defensive of their system because they saw research as criticism and it took



several visits before this was overcome. It was not until 20 July 1994 when my research diary reads “I feel much more comfortable at this school now” that I felt I had finally gained their confidence. At School B, on the other hand, I had worked at the school some years previously and knew some of the staff. I explained the research to the staff myself and felt more accepted.

At School A there was a change of headteacher at the beginning of the spring term 1996 and again in the autumn. Although the previous headteacher had left information about my research I had to regain access and approval.

In 3.4.2.1 I describe how I was invited to School A to talk to the participating parents of the September intake as a group before I began which helped to legitimise the research. However, at the beginning of the first interview, with all parents, I reiterated the reasons for the research, what would happen to the information and that the information they gave me would be confidential. On subsequent visits many asked how the research was progressing. Many of them talked to one another about it and learned that their friends were also involved. At School B some of the parents knew that I had worked previously with some of the staff and I wondered if this might cause them to be cautious in their openness in answering some of my questions. As far as I am aware this was not the case. My research diary reads

“28.06.94: I feel very privileged being allowed to look at the workings of three schools.”

### **3.5.2. RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHILDREN**

I discuss many of the issues relating to my relationship with the children in 3.4.3 however I would add here that over the years that I worked with the children I built up a successful rapport with them although I am unsure how they viewed me. They knew that I spoke with their parents and teachers but were unsure as to my role. In his research Pollard (1996) describes a similar situation.

“Here was an adult who was often at school, but who did not behave like a teacher, parent, dinner supervisor or classroom assistant”

(Pollard 1996, p.294)

I was able to draw on my years of experience of talking to young children as a teacher to encourage them to share their thoughts with me by being interested in their views.

### **3.5.3. RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARENTS**

In section 3.4.3.1 I discuss the issues of power relationships with children. Some of these aspects may also apply to adults. Issues of the culture that I am coming from and social category from which I belong shapes the project and may influence the amount of information which interviewees are willing to give. For example, I come from an academic background which may have affected the way in which participants viewed me. I took care to avoid jargon and tried to present myself in a way that was acceptable. For example, I wore colours with attributes that are considered non-threatening, trustworthy and that inspire confidence (Spillane, 1991). Equally, I needed to be open-minded to what I might find.

In the event I was accepted by all the parents and welcomed as a friend on subsequent visits. Relationships developed as they got to know me better. For example, I was invited to attend an art session that a parent was running during the holidays, another invited me to a clothes party, a third discussed and shared reading material for a course that she was attending. As the relationships developed so, too, did my interviewing skills. My research diary reads

“20.06.94: Finding it easier to conduct the interviews as I go along. Still get anxious about asking people to take part - it seems such an imposition on their time, yet at the end of each one most of them have said how much they have enjoyed it and how useful they have found it”.

Consequently the interviews that I conducted at the end of the three year period were far more relaxed and open than those at the beginning. However, it was also necessary to “maintain distance” (Powney and Watts 1987, p.43), especially as respondents sometimes asked questions of me about the schools’ systems. For example, I was asked about the reasons behind the structure of classes on forthcoming transitions or when the next parents’ evenings were taking place.

#### **3.5.4. EXIT PROCEDURES**

Exit procedures are just as likely to cause problems as engagement at the beginning, especially if, having disengaged, I might have realised that I had not completed after all and needed to return. As it happened this was not the case. At the beginning of the final interview, therefore, I informed

participants that this would be the last time that I talked with them about the project. At the end of the final interview I again reiterated this and thanked them for their time and thoughts. I explained the next steps that I would be taking and that it would take me several months of writing before the study would be completed. Some parents asked me to keep in touch and also offered further help if it was needed. I took up this offer in two cases and asked them to read draft copies in order to check for accuracy and accessibility. Similarly, at the two schools I asked a member of staff from each if they would read through a draft copy. The children were disappointed that they would not be seeing me again in that context but I assured them that they had been helpful and that some of their words would be written in the final text. (I had asked them at each interview if I might do this.)

I felt that it was important to give parents and practitioners on-going feedback on the data that I gathered. After each series of interviews I made a brief analysis of the findings for the practitioners (see Appendix 9 for some examples) and at the end of each academic year I sent a letter of thanks to all the parents who had participated, with a summary of findings (see Appendices 10a, 10b, 10c and 10d).

### **3.6. THE PROCESS OF ANALYSIS**

Writers such as Miles and Huberman (1994), Robson (1993), Riley (1990) and Dey (1993) provide a range of strategies that can be applied to analysing data, in particular qualitative data such as that which formed the main part of my data collection. They all suggest that collection, writing and analysis go side by side and that interpretation builds, layer on layer, throughout this time.

#### **3.6.1. SPECULATIVE ANALYSIS**

I collected the data over a period of three years and two months starting in May 1994 and ending in July 1997. Speculative analysis was on-going throughout that time with issues emerging as the information was gathered. This was used to feed forward and inform the questions for subsequent interviews. Insights from one analysis sometimes opened new avenues. For example in February 1995 issues about summer born children and the age of starting school began to emerge as I conducted interviews with parents about the summer intake. As a result I introduced a question, for all parents, about the age of starting school and their perception of the benefits of early entry during the July 1995 interviews. The analysis, therefore, caused me to question and adjust some of my initial research questions and raise new questions.

Throughout this time I was looking for possible connections in the data and identifying major categories. It was particularly important to be flexible

during these early stages when some main areas were yet to develop. I was on the look out for key themes, for unusual issues, for similarities and differences. These were often noted in the margins of the interview record as I was conducting interviews. These memos were a useful means of “capturing ideas, views and intuitions” (Robson 1993, p.386) as I went along. Many of these were intuitive (Robinson and Garratt 1998, p.26) but I was also rational and used the evidence that I had collected to inform my decisions.

A brief outline analysis was made and sent to each school after every phase of data collection. (Some examples can be found in Appendix 9.) This helped me to explore the relevance of the material and to get a feel for the major issues that were emerging.

During the data collection each parent and child was allocated a code of A or B according to the school, plus a code for the term in which they started (A for autumn, J for January and S for summer), plus a number. Thus BJ3 would translate as a parent or child from School B who started school in January 1995 and was the third parent on the list. Twins caused a coding problem as the number was allocated to the parent rather than their child(ren). There was one set of twins and they were given the code AJ7a and AJ7b. Practitioners were allocated a code according to their school and position.

After seven months I reorganised the data I had collected as, by this time, I had amassed a large amount of material. Categories were beginning to emerge and I wanted to be able to handle the documentation more easily. I organised it into four, lever arch, files: Parents at School A; Parents at School B; Children at Schools A and B; Practitioners at Schools A and B.

### **3.6.2. CONCEPTUAL CATEGORIES**

The next stage of the analysis involved classifying and categorising the data in order for it to take on conceptual categories. Through reading and re-reading the data I identified events, time-lines, relationships, children's and adult's perspectives. Organising the data in this way reduced the complexities of it, enabled me to identify the important features of my study and helped me to build theories. It was at this time that chapter headings and subheadings began to emerge.

Events emerging from the literature and the data were processed (Wolcott 1994, p.24) and given broad codes identified by aspect, followed by the initial code which identified individuals. I attempted to create logical categories with core and sub-categories. For example 'concerns about starting school' was sub-divided into 'physical environment' and 'social environment'. These large groups were then tagged again, often in more than one category, and analysed further. This sometimes created pieces that did not fit and they were put on one side until I decided what to do with them. For example, an outlier of 'concerns about starting school' was the

style of building and access for parents. Eventually, after experimenting with different categories, I incorporated this aspect with partnership. I did not want to 'straight jacket' myself by putting answers in a category too early as some may have a hidden or underlying meaning that might be transferred to another issue. Indeed, the category of partnership was a multi-faceted, complex area which was often informed by answers from another category. This

“coding as an analytical process is a method for breaking down the ‘natural’ structure of data and reconstructing them in new ways.”

(Gerwirtz et al 1995, p.18)

However, it was not just a mechanical process but a creative one, as I was looking for patterns and relationships between material which was often in brief phrases scattered throughout the interviews. These needed to be identified and pulled together to make a logical whole but sometimes novel categories sprang from the data. Detailed scrutiny of the data developed the category of 'transition confusion' in which children had not realised that their friends or siblings would also be moving class or that they themselves would be progressing to another year group.

I had, for some time, been toying with the idea of computer analysis. On 19 June 1996 I attended an In-service day on QSR NUD•IST, a computer programme which assists in analysing non-numerical unstructured data by supporting processes of indexing, searching and theorising. Although the use of a computer programme would have helped in identifying patterns and the logical relationship between different phases, I had been collecting



and analysing the data for two years by then and had already established categories, so I decided not to use it. A further reason at that time, was access to a computer, although in July 1996 this was resolved.

There were many overlapping categories which made it difficult to decide where every item of data might fit but it was important that every aspect fitted somewhere into the conceptual framework (see Part Two). Some categories were exclusive to one section whereas others, for example children's emotional well being and friendships, were inclusive in several.

In some categories it was possible to quantify and then compare differences, for example parents' reasons for choosing a school and thus I was able to extend the quantitative analysis into qualitative analysis.

I was aware that the categories should stay relevant to my research questions but equally, that these questions were not imposed on the data. Some of these categories changed again when I came to finally writing up, as I re-visited them and re-packed them for my audience. As I read through the data again I was able to recall the people, the room where we sat, the expression in their voice, and their particular pet which sat with me! This enabled me to bring the characters in my story 'alive'.

**3.6.3. VALIDITY**

One question that I needed to ask myself was how can I trust these categories? As regards the notion of a time line, I looked to see if it was consistent with others in the field such as the transitions that Ghaye and Pascal (1988) identified and the stages of transition distinguished by van Genneep (1960). In other aspects I went back to those involved and asked them if the categories sounded valid and if there was anything they thought I might have overlooked. I also asked colleagues if the chosen categories sounded feasible.

### 3.7. COMMUNICATING THE FINDINGS

“The reporting of qualitative data may be one of the most fertile fields going; there are no fixed formats, and the ways data are being analyzed and interpreted are getting more and more various. . . . The challenge is to combine theoretical elegance and credibility appropriately with the many ways social events can be described ...”

(Miles and Huberman 1994, p.299)

One of the aims of my thesis is to communicate information stemming from the data, effectively and accurately to others. Therefore, it has to be readily accessible, clear and coherent. The creation of authoritative texts in an appropriate genre for the event can be problematic as there is a tension between traditional and post-modern approaches. It has been suggested (Robson, 1993; Miles and Huberman, 1994; and Sparkes, 1995) that conventional formats of analysis are often too constraining and that reporting formats must respect “local groundedness, holism, temporal extension, access to causality, emphasis on meanings” (Miles and Huberman 1994, p.298). However, Nisbet and Entwistle (1984, p.253) suggest that unnecessary departures from a conventional form of reporting are an obstacle to communication as “originality finds expression in the ideas, not in the form of the report”.

In order to elicit the imagination of the reader, involve their emotions and to get a response, I wanted to draw on alternative forms of representation which take into account the context, the influences on the thinking of those involved, as well as the main issues that are under discussion in the analysis.

“The problem is how to convey the sense of flux, process, messiness, inconsistency, ambiguity, which is the very essence of everyday life.”

(Woods 1986, p.186).

A softening of boundaries between fact and fiction to make “persuasive fictions” (Strathern 1987, p.251) was needed. However, there are few written agreed guidelines for creating authoritative, qualitative texts of this nature that are academic, theoretical and analytical. I set about finding texts which would legitimise my developing ideas.

In making accounts accessible to others Dey (1993, p.238) suggests that some of the techniques involved in storytelling need to be employed, whereby the reader gains a vivid and convincing description of the setting, is able to empathise with one or more characters and can see the evolution of the plot towards some sort of climax or resolution; where a good story is

“like a journey, in which we travel with the characters through the intricacies of the plot, to arrive at a conclusion.”

(Dey 1993, p.238).

The notion of a story according to Bruner (1996a, p.121) is that it “has two sides to it: a sequence of events, and an implied evaluation of the events recounted”. Its structure is a hermeneutic circle in which

“the events recounted in a story take their meaning from the story as a whole. But the story as a whole is something that is constructed from its parts”.

(Bruner, 1996a, p.122)

At the same time the reporting needs to be a ‘true’ representation. During the 1890s Margaret McMillan succeeded in this respect in that she created fictional characters from events that were happening in order to persuade

society to change. Thus, she attempted to dramatise a set of ideas through “fictional allegory” (Steedman 1990, p.142). Miles and Huberman (1994, p.81) refer to focused descriptions in which a series of events are taken to be representative, typical or emblematic of the study as ‘vignettes’. Sparkes, (1995, p.159) suggests that qualitative researchers need to capture “lived experience” through scientific, realist, confessional and impressionist tales, narratives of self, poetic representation, ethnographic drama and ethnographic fiction. Structures suggested by Robson (1993, p.417) for case studies are the suspense structure, the narrative report, the comparative structure, the chronological structure, theory-generating structures and unsequenced structures.

### **3.7.1. THE PURPOSE OF REPORTING**

Who is the report for? There are several parties likely to be concerned with the content and the way in which my work is eventually reported. You, the reader, have several forms; those examining the thesis; parents; practitioners; colleagues in Higher Education; as well as those who took part in the research, including the children. Therefore, I have a responsibility not only to disseminate the results but also to strive to inform and influence several different audiences.

What am I seeking to achieve? Certainly that I communicate with my audience. I want to help you gain access to my work and enable you to empathise with the participants and come away with heightened sensitivities about the lives of the people involved. Therefore, I need to include data

that is in a form that is readily accessible to you, where you can engage with the ideas, that is of interest and readable, yet which supports my interpretation. Agar (1986) in Miles and Huberman (1994, p.299) states that “Ethnography . . . . is interpretive, mediating two worlds through a third”. In other words, the report is my interpretation of the respondents’ interpretations of situations and aims to construct their reality in order to enable the reader to relive the experience, while shaping and influencing their thoughts. It needs to build a bridge to another life in order to help you to understand the world of the other stakeholders, to connect you with the ideas, beliefs and feelings of others: To create a lived world. At the same time, I want to help you to question and examine so called certainties and to open possibilities of new thinking and possibly construct new knowledge. This led me to asking how could this be done? What format would enable me to do this?

### ***3.7.2. THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE FORMAT***

What is the best way of communicating? Not only must I take note of the intended audience to whom I am communicating, but the writing also needs to be clear, forceful and easy to read in order for it to be “meaningful and easily grasped” (Wiseman 1952, p.8).

The appropriate format depends not only on communicating successfully to my audience, but also on the nature and purpose of the enquiry itself. In interpreting the world of induction and transition there are a number of influences on the issues and those involved. I needed, therefore, to consider

writing in a range of styles and drawing on a range of devices and genres of representation to reflect the various views that I gathered, and communicate, through them, in a way that was appropriate to the context. This in itself created difficulties because, in writing in genres that make for interesting reading and which help to incorporate the findings, I did not want to lose the essence of the research, lose sight of the rigour needed in the process of analysis or have the format itself detract from the findings in my preoccupation with style and genre.

I needed to include adequate data for “criticism and debate” (Powney and Watts 1987, p.191), analyse, explain, draw out common features across situations, identify patterns of behaviour and so forth from snapshots of life over a three year period;

- before the children started the induction to school
- six weeks after they had begun school
- at the end of the first term
- end of YR
- beginning of Y1
- end of Y1
- beginning of Y2
- end of Y2

In order to reveal and reflect as normal a situation as is possible the presentation of the information needed to provide ‘pictures’ of the groups (parents, practitioners and children) under investigation. I revisited some areas within the analysis, building a broader picture, as well as focusing on particular elements and aspects. I did this by drawing together phrases and sentences of fragmented knowledge and understanding from my

respondents to read as a whole, thus attempting to transmit social and cultural understanding. It does not represent the original event itself but rather, creates narratives out of raw material to

“illustrate the meshing of individual narratives into new collective and individual wholes”

(Gura 1996, p.43).

The issues arise from the literature and data with interpretations and judgements being made in each of the scenes. The experiences and form bring about the genre, thus the material itself dictates the form in which it is written.

### **3.7.3. REPRESENTATION**

While interpreting the experiences and lives of others I needed to ensure that their views and voices were represented. The account needed to carry their messages both individually and collectively. In constructing scenes I have ‘constructed’ people and put words in their mouths based on raw data and the study’s major findings and upon common points, such as McMillan did when she “invented” her child characters (Steedman 1990, p.154). I have attempted to show people as rounded characters. I have tried to capture their expressed thoughts and represent not only what the respondents felt and said, but also to include a picture of their social and cultural contexts. The words and phrases are theirs but I have brought them together from a number of conversations and observations, adapted them and linked them. As a result ‘illustrative scenes’ come about which are not necessarily factual accounts but rather ‘factions’ which let the voices of the



participants be heard, and are used as a means to describe their lived experiences.

Within this there was a moral dilemma of how to represent each 'person'. As the reader sees more of each person, might they think that they recognise that person even though each one is an amalgam of several? But equally, the participants' realities needed to be seen to be included. An ethical consideration was the extent to which the participants' interests, individually or collectively, were affected by the report (Robson 1993, p.411).

#### **3.7.4. MY VOICE**

A balance was needed between a passive, impersonal style and one with "too much authorial intrusion, with 'I did this and then I . . .'" (Robson 1993, p.412). How much, then, was needed of the first person? Should I have disappeared? I think not as I, too, write from a specific cultural background that influences how I work and the interpretations that I put on the findings. As Bruner (1996a, p.123) states "stories are the product of narrators, and narrators have points of view". Thus, my own role also shapes the outcomes and should be included.

The challenge I faced was to write about how others understand and perceive the world yet find a convention to allow the audience to distinguish my words and ideas from those of my informants. In effect, how

much should I be written into, rather than out of, the text and what form would this take? I was able to do this in Chapter 4.2, which is written in the style of a radio programme, where I am one of the panel being interviewed and in Chapter 4.3, a newspaper article allows my words to be included in the text.

### **3.7.5. EVIDENCE OF VOICES**

An important part of persuading and influencing the audience relates to how the voices of participants are integrated. In designing and writing the report I needed to make choices of what to include and omit. However, this raises the question of whether individuals, unique within groups, should be included or dropped from the analysis (Tudge et al 1997b, p.2). Although this was guided by my research aims, by selecting some responses, it meant that other items and responses were left out (Powney and Watts 1987, p.191). In the final text the reader might be left asking where has the evidence come from?

To illustrate how scenes have developed from composite case studies, the following 'raw' data has been highlighted to indicate where some of the words and phrases have been selected from in order to compose two letters from two of the 'voices' within a scene about summer born children:

AS1. It's unfair against those who start in September. They penalise the young ones who need to have the extra. It's just the way it goes. *Ideally it would be nice if they could all start at the same time, although he would only be four.*

AS2. If your child is fairly mature they're not going to be too disadvantaged. For some it's a big disadvantage especially if they don't go to playschool. Research suggests that they don't do as well. The national tables indicate this. *I would have consciously planned them earlier if I'd known before.* They're all in the same position. I suppose I don't like the idea of moving on. *I suppose you feel it'll be like starting again in September* because they only have one term with that teacher. I'm pleased they're staying together (next term). I don't understand it (the system for organising the classes). I think that she'll be at school properly and no longer a baby.

AS3. *I'm glad they've got a class of their own.* I'm pleased they're staying as a group until Easter. Reception is very much about an introduction, it just goes on from there.

AS4. *They might have to go into classes that are already there and they're different ages.* There are so many children but it's hard to get them in. It's only a few weeks and then they're on holiday. I'm feeling they're going up with the other older children. It worries you. You want them to get on.

AS5. I'm so upset. I think it's cruel and unfair. Just because you're born at a particular time of year, you miss out. I'm angry that they don't get a good deal.

AS6. *I'm very relieved that he's going into a Reception class. I'd be very unhappy if he went in with the older ones. It's very much a bonus.* I'm quite pleased. I'm a bit old school. I like the starters starting together and keeping in the same class.

AS7. He's ready for school and September would be too long to wait. I don't fully understand it. At the end of August they're going into a class that's formed for a year. He'll be behind. Stability is more important.

#### THE FINAL TEXT:

Dear 'Granny'

It seems that Stacey's only got one term in this class, the ones who started in September have had three terms in school! I can't see how she's going to catch up with those children. They penalise the young ones who need to have the extra help. I'm so upset, I think it's cruel and unfair. Just because Stacey's born at a particular time of year, she misses out. I'm angry that she won't get a good deal. We'd have consciously planned her earlier if we'd known.

Stacey says you have to do work at school. She loves PE and apparatus and next week...

Lorraine

*Dear Lorraine,*

*You mustn't get so angry. Ideally it would be nice if they could all start at the same time, although Stacey would only have been just four last September. I'm relieved that she's going into a Reception class with children her own age. I'd be very unhappy if she went into a class with older ones. It's very much a bonus that she'll be with her friends.*

*What concerns me more is if she has to move at the end of this term. I'd like her to stay in that class because they don't have long in reception and she'd have another new start so shortly after starting school if she moved class in September. You must find out what happens next term. Will she be with her friends again then or will she move to a class with different children? Perhaps she'll meet up with her friends from playgroup who started before her.*

*Now, what did you think about . . .*

*Mum*

In this compilation, as in others, I had to identify the main issues in the analysis which, in this case, were the perceived injustices of the length of time summer born children spend in the reception class and the notion of continuity of teacher and children's friendships after the reception class. I then reassembled the original words in order to see the actual words that were said before identifying and extracting the words that would make up the final text.

### **3.7.6. WHAT WILL THE REPORT LOOK LIKE?**

In creating composite characters and families to represent the voices of the two schools, I created two 'families' with fictional names which built gradually as I was writing up the findings and analysis until they became:

SCHOOL A	SCHOOL B
<p>Debbie: Hayley's mother @virgin.net</p> <p>John: Hayley's father.</p> <p>Hayley: daughter (summer born) Emma: Hayley's friend. James: Hayley's older brother. (September intake; one and a half years previously) Richard: James' friend.</p> <p>Mrs Brown: Reception class teacher</p>	<p>Lorraine Stacey's mother @BTinternet.com</p> <p><i>'Granny': Lorraine's mother</i></p> <p>Stacey: daughter (summer born). No other siblings Samantha: September intake friend. Stephanie: January intake friend.</p> <p>Mrs Coral and Mrs Grey: Y1/Y2 teachers.</p>

Each section in Part Four of the thesis stands on its own but needed to be linked to the whole. Letters and electronic communications between composite characters 'Debbie' and 'Lorraine' run throughout to illustrate two groups of parents in two different schools, represented through two individual voices. These are on-going throughout the analysis and link the various chapters. This dialogue between two 'sides' not only links the sections together but aims to help the reader to understand that there are a number of decisions that people can make and that there is often a lack of understanding, on the part of the participants, about the nature of the decisions to be made. It aims to help the reader to see the questioning, concerns, and unresolved events in the lives of the participants and gives a divergence of views. However, it is important to remember that I can never

connect all the elements entirely as the 'reality' of the research itself has messiness and disconnectedness.

As well as representing the people at the two schools I wanted to include ways of representing some of the elements that might have influenced their thinking, such as the media, family, friends and government reports. To communicate the findings and analysis Part Four comprises eight chapters:

- ◆ Chapter 4.1.1 uses evidence from the questionnaire to give a descriptive background to the induction procedures in the area where the study was conducted.
- ◆ Chapter 4.1.2 introduces one family and is written in the form of letters between mother and daughter. This was influenced by the importance of the family in sharing decisions and disappointments. The notion of letters was influenced by the work of historian E.A. Smith (1993) who writes the story of Queen Caroline through letters.
- ◆ Chapter 4.2. is represented by a radio magazine programme and includes my voice, the voice of parents, and practitioners. It is a blend of 'realism' and fiction in place, time and people. I included a radio programme because many of the parents whom I interviewed in 1995 mentioned that they had heard about spending cuts in education from the radio.
- ◆ Chapter 4.3 is in the form of a newspaper article and represents the voices of parents, experts in the field and my voice. The local newspaper

influenced my writing after an article in the local paper highlighted the dangers of drugs found on school B's playing field.

- ◆ Chapters 4.4 and 4.6 are in the form of letters, faxes, e-mail and telephone conversations. Technology has played an important part in my writing and increasingly is used to communicate in our everyday lives. My work was also influenced by the work of David Lodge (1978) in "Changing Places" in which he wrote a chapter entitled 'Corresponding' using letters to tell the story.
- ◆ Chapter 4.5 draws the audience into the child's world where they see, hear, and feel the influence of playgroup, home and the child's peers. This is represented as a family conversation in which the child has the main voice.
- ◆ Chapter 4.7 comprises conversations between children and conversations between teachers. The importance of friendships was apparent throughout the research and I wanted to reflect this in my writing. The importance of building a positive working relationship with the participants was also influential in writing this chapter.
- ◆ Chapter 4.8 takes a different format and describes changes that have taken place in the two schools over the three years that I conducted the research.

Each chapter begins with an explanation of the style in which it is written and a brief explanation of the content. Each concludes with a summary of

main issues. These are set in double lined and dotted lined boxes, respectively. The character dialogue is enclosed in single line boxes.

### **3.7.7. AUTHENTICITY AND VALIDITY**

Wolcott (1994, p.353) and Robson (1993, p.404) advocate “peer debriefing” to uphold validity of the report. This is a continuous process, throughout the writing, of sharing the developing manuscripts with informed readers as part of the process of analysing and writing. As my thesis evolved I asked some of those involved for their reactions and asked them to check for accuracy. These included two parents (one from each school), a teacher, a headteacher and a co-ordinator. I also consulted ‘outsiders’ who used to be reception class teachers, one of whom is now a radio presenter, as

“readers not so closely involved can be helpful in assessing the suitability of my analytical concepts, my sensitivity to the people involved, or the adequacy and appropriateness of interpretations made and lessons drawn.”

(Wolcott 1994, p.353)

Those parents who read through the findings as part of verifying the credibility of the account were able to recognise which was ‘their’ school but did not consider this a disadvantage. One parent said that it gave an accurate picture and that “it felt like reading my own diary”.

## **CONCLUSION**

Conventional formats of reporting findings can be constraining and stilted.

In order to communicate with my audience(s), involve them and help them



to see the world of others, it was necessary to consider alternative genres. These take the form of ‘illustrative scenes’ but are also a ‘true’ representation and appropriate to the context. This was not an easy process, as the job of conveying emotions in words is different from the feelings that the interviewees conveyed to me. The unspoken is difficult to write - a look in the eye, the arch of an eyebrow, a gesture of a hand speak pages but cannot be written. Perhaps a story can only convey truth to those who share its experiences but, as Waterland (1994, p.8) states,

“no one can record the exact truth about feelings, not even his or her own”.

I have considered the reporting format in the light of the processes that I have gone through in collecting the data and analysing the findings, while reflecting the trust and emotions that were shown by the participants about the events that influenced their thinking.

## **PART FOUR**

### **FINDINGS AND IDENTIFICATION OF ISSUES**

Part Four follows the journey of two ‘families’ as their children enter Reception class at school and progress through Key Stage One. The story includes their teachers and friends and draws on the data evidence and relevant literature to identify the issues. It examines, through ‘illustrative scenes’, the findings in the two case study schools and explores the nature and significance of the issues which arise. The interrelationship between some of the issues is explored further in Part Five. The opening chapter sets the scene by giving an overview of the induction systems in the locality of the two case study schools.

#### **4.1.**

### **CHOOSING A SCHOOL**

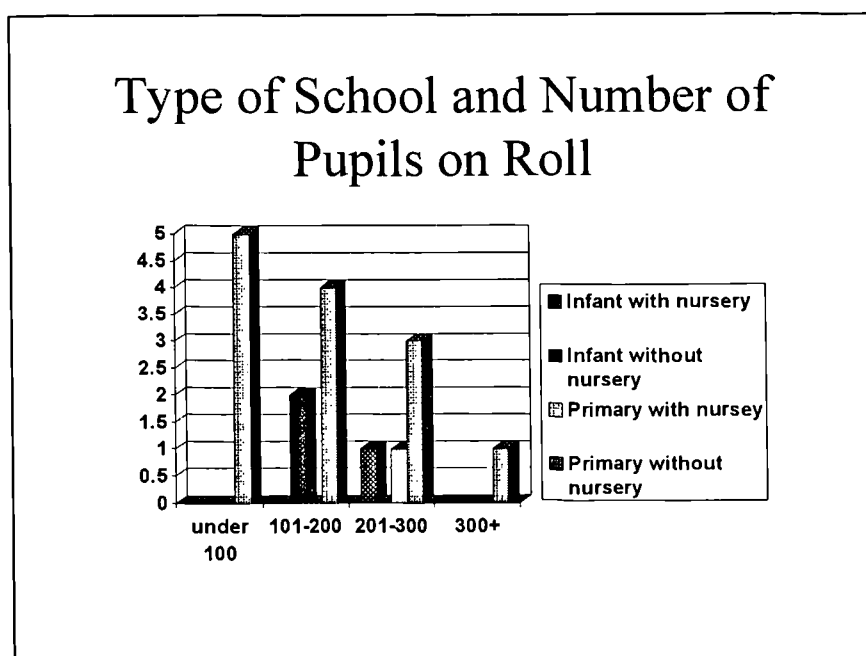
#### **4.1.1. INDUCTION PROCEDURES IN THE LOCAL SCHOOLS**

**“I want to make the step to starting school easy, happy and something for all concerned to look forward to.”**  
**(Reception Teacher at School 12)**

The information resulting from the survey questionnaires serves to give a description of induction practices in maintained schools in the locality of the

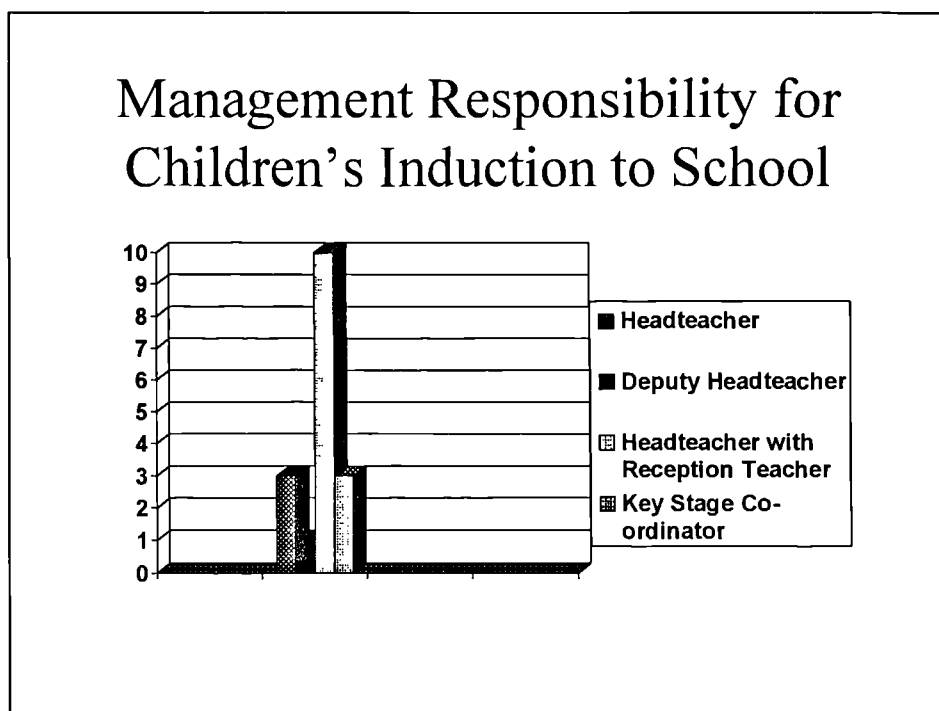
case study schools during the autumn of 1994. I shall use actual numbers rather than percentages in those instances where quantitative results are included.

The questionnaire was sent to 26 schools in an area of one LEA. There were replies from 17 schools: Seventeen from headteachers and nineteen from Reception class teachers at sixteen of those schools. Fourteen primary schools replied; one with a nursery and thirteen without a nursery. Three infant schools replied; one with a nursery and two without. The schools ranged in size from schools with under 100 pupils on roll to one school with over 400 pupils. In between there were six schools with 101-200 pupils and five schools with 201-300 pupils. (See Data Chart 1.) Eleven had a written admissions policy and six a written induction policy.



Data Chart 1

The management of the induction was considered the joint responsibility of the headteacher and the reception class teacher in most instances. (See Data Chart 2.)



Data Chart 2

Fourteen schools followed the LEA Admission Policy and had three intakes of children a year; September, January and April, admitting children “full-time at the beginning of the term in which their fifth birthday falls” (Shropshire County Council 1998, p.5). Two schools had two intakes a year; September and January and one school admitted children “individually on the appropriate day”. Nine schools accepted children on a part-time basis in the term before they were five.

Those schools which encouraged children to attend part-time said that this was because they were concerned that those children with summer birthdays should not be disadvantaged and part-time “gives the children the longest possible amount of time in school” (headteacher at School 9). However, only three schools would consider an annual admission date if it were suggested by the LEA.

One school made home visits before the children began school. All the schools invited parents and children to visit the school beforehand. These visits took a number of formats. Five schools invited the parents on their own before inviting them with their children. The other schools invited the parents and children together. Some invited the children with or without their parents at a later date for one or more further visits. The visits took place at different times and included a combination of one or more of the following:

- an evening visit for parents;
- morning visits;
- afternoon visits;
- all day visits; and
- lunch time visits.

In four schools the system of visits varied for those children starting school in the autumn term. In these schools the number of visits were reduced, and eliminated altogether in one school. According to the headteachers the visits comprised a combination of:

- administrative details
- the headteacher talking to parents;
- giving information about the curriculum;
- explaining pre-entry booklets;
- watching slides of school activities;
- answering parents' questions;
- giving parents a tour of the school;
- preparing children for school;
- having lunch; and
- one school which had "three afternoon training sessions for parents"

Nineteen Reception class teachers replied from 16 schools. They saw the

main priorities for the children's visits as an opportunity:

- |  |    |
|--|----|
| • for familiarisation with the classroom and school building       | 13 |
| • for children to meet their peer group                            | 11 |
| • for children to meet their teacher                               | 11 |
| • to see school as an enjoyable, friendly, positive exciting place | 8  |
| • for the teacher to meet children                                 | 7  |
| • for children to get to know school routines and expectations     | 6  |
| • for the teacher to meet parents                                  | 5  |
| • for children to relax and be reassured                           | 5  |
| • to make assessments and gain information about children          | 5  |
| • for children to meet the classroom assistant                     | 2  |
| • for children to see that they and their work are valued          | 2  |
| • for children to spend time away from their parent                | 1  |
| • to be introduced to activities                                   | 1  |
| • to see the class at work   | 1  |

Their main aims were to "allay fears of the unknown", "to make the entry

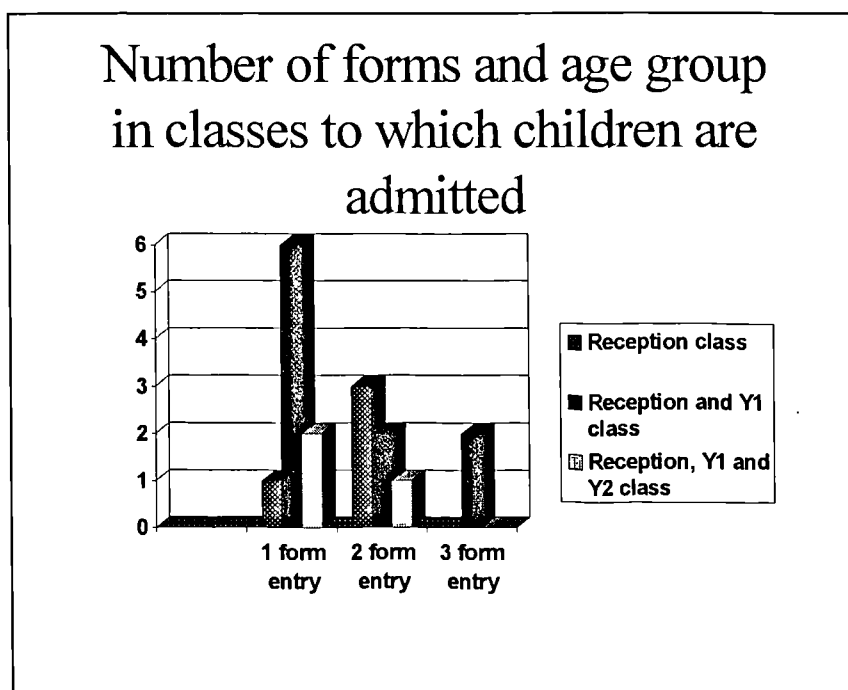
less traumatic" and the "reduction of stress levels". The headteachers saw

the visits as a time:

- |   |    |
|---|----|
| • to familiarise parents and children with the school | 11 |
| • allay any anxieties to ensure a stress-free start   | 5  |
| • to begin home school partnerships                   | 4  |
| • for school to make assessments                      | 3  |
| • for children to begin to develop friendships        | 3  |

Thirteen of the schools had contact with their local pre-schools settings. Before the children started school teachers visited the children in their setting and the children visited school from their pre-school setting for special events such as Christmas concerts or to visit the classroom.

Nine schools had one form entry, six schools had two form and two schools had a three form entry. Children began school in a class comprising Reception children or Reception and Year One children or Reception, Year One and Year Two children. (See Data Chart 3.)



Data Chart 3

The majority of schools entered children into a mixed Reception and Year One class. Two of the infant schools admitted children into Reception

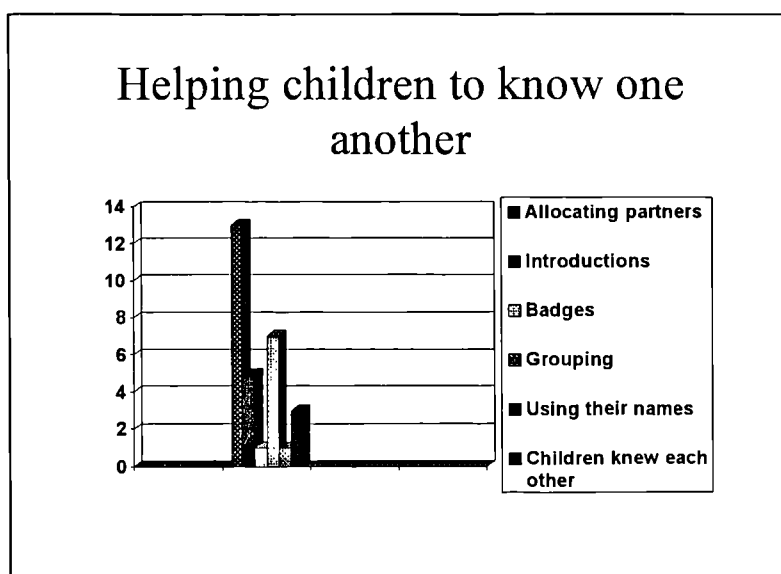
classes and saw benefits in this rather than having mixed Reception and Year One classes.

On the first day all the new intake started school together on one day except in three schools which had a staggered entry system. Children and their parents adopted the school system of either staying on the playground with the rest of the children or going straight into school on arrival. In three cases this was different. In one school the new intake were admitted in the afternoon on their first day, in another they arrived after the rest of the class and in the third they started the day at an earlier time than the rest of the class. Parents were expected to help children to find their coat pegs, put PE bags and lunch boxes in the appropriate places and then leave. All teachers endeavoured to give the children a gentle start to their first day.

New routines and experiences such as assembly, lunch time and playtime were introduced through the teacher giving explanations beforehand in order to “make children feel secure” (Reception Teacher, School 23). At one school parents were invited to lunch on the first day but generally these features to school life were introduced slowly with levels of teacher support gradually being reduced. In all but two of the schools the children went out to play with the rest of the school on the first day. In the other two schools the new intake had playtime with other infant children.



Reception class teachers had a number of systems in place for helping children to get to know one another and develop friendships. These included inter alia a combination of giving children an older 'partner' to look after them, introducing the children either during 'circle time' or in assembly, giving them badges or grouping them to work together. (See Data Chart 4.)



Data Chart 4

Staff encouraged partnership with parents through:

- having an open door policy 14
- inviting parents to help 6
- parents' evenings/days 6
- home/school 'diaries' 9
- PTA 5
- newsletters 1

The open door policy at the beginning and end of school was seen as a means for sharing problems, while diaries and parents' evenings were viewed as a means of communication about progress.

**Conclusions**

There were considerable differences in the admission policies and induction procedures in schools in the same area which raises questions of equality of opportunity. The headteachers and the Reception class teachers had different perceptions of the value and content of the pre-start visits. One school made home visits and all schools, except one, offer induction visits for children and their parents before every entry. Partnership with pre-school settings helps to ease the transition to school and there are a variety of means by which parental partnership are developed.

**Summary**

- *Schools in the locality are mainly primary schools with 100-301 pupils on roll.*
- *82% of schools follow LEA admission guidelines of three intakes a year in the term before their fifth birthday.*
- *52% of schools start children on a part-time basis.*
- *All schools except one offer induction visits for children and their parents before every intake.*
- *Headteachers and reception teachers usually manage the induction system.*
- *64% of children started school at the beginning of term at the start of the school day.*
- *Children are introduced to potentially 'difficult' times such assembly, playtime and lunch times in a careful manner.*
- *Children are introduced to other members of the class.*
- *Partnership is seen by the schools in terms of opportunities for parents to approach staff.*

#### 4.1.2.

### OPEN ENROLMENT: PARENTAL CHOICE OR CONFUSION?

**“We thought the council would automatically register him.”  
(Parent at School A, May 1994)**

In this section we meet one of our ‘families’ for the first time. This is Lorraine, our composite parent from School B and her mother with whom she communicates family concerns by letter. Many parents in my study mentioned ‘granny’ as being an important influence because she often took on the role of childminder and/or offered invaluable advice in child rearing. One of the main influences, therefore, which may affect the start of school, seems to be that of the family.

This section explores some of the choices facing parents as they decide upon a school for their child. It also takes into account some of the issues surrounding marketing that schools face. The data was gathered during the first two interviews with parents and explored the reasons why they chose a particular school for their child and what factors they weighed, the questions that they would ask the school on a pre-registration visit and their awareness of educational issues which are reported in the media. I asked the induction co-ordinators about whether or not they actively marketed their school and, if so, how this was done.

It begins with the relevant literature, includes some correspondence between Lorraine and her mum, ‘Granny’, discusses the data further and concludes by analysing some of the issues raised.

Schools in England are now set within a market system of parental choice, open enrolment, devolved budgets and formula funding. This framework was established by the provisions of the Education Reform Act 1988 and given reinforcement by the 1993 Act. However, this market place culture may cause confusion when parents consider which school they want their child to attend.

Open enrolment was a commitment in the Conservative Party's 1987 general election manifesto which described the political thinking behind the idea of an education market (Gewirtz et al 1995).

“From 1980 onwards a series of Education Acts has attempted to increase parents' ability to choose the school they want their child to attend, and has sought to make schools more responsive to parents' wishes.”

(Hughes et al 1994, p.78)

The implication is that parents should be consumers as well as partners who will make considered choices between schools on the basis of a careful and well informed comparison of each school's educational philosophy, policies and academic results.

Education markets are localised and need to be viewed in context. Hubberstey (1994) suggests that parents need to conduct some research on possible schools for their child by contacting the LEA schools' admissions office for information on all the schools in the area or going to the local library where “local schools should have deposited their own prospectuses”. In addition she proposes that parents contact OFSTED to find out if a recent inspection has been carried out. At a more local level she advocates that parents stand outside the school and watch how it operates at the beginning and end of the day and at break times. She suggests that parents visit a number of schools and ask the headteacher questions such as

“what the maximum class size is and how much non-teaching support is available; whether the numbers on the roll are rising or falling; whether the implementation of the

National Curriculum has posed any difficulties; if there is a school policy on bullying.”

(Hubberstey 1994, p.4)

However, this information may be ambiguous and hold little meaning for those who are unsure about what it is they are looking for in a school. Subsequently, lack of knowledge about what it is that they need to know in order to evaluate schools makes it difficult for parents to chose a school for their child. As Dowling (1995) states

. . . in some areas parents have little awareness of their opportunity for choice and, even if they do, they lack the time, energy or finance for transport to exercise it.”

(Dowling 1995, p.15)

Further to this, each factor is not necessarily interlinked, nor do parents necessarily make choices in a logical way, listing criteria in a hierarchical fashion. Clearly, this approach “fails to capture the messy, multidimensional, intuitive and seemingly irrational or non-rational elements of choice” (Gewirtz et al 1995, p.6) which is made within a social context and which is influenced by a family’s cultural and ethnic values.

“. . . representation in terms of race, ethnicity, gender and disability can provide important indicators for parents concerned both about the value which a child care setting places on diversity, and for the development of self-esteem and self-perceptions of those children who might attend.”

(Brophy and Statham 1994, p.69)

In reality, therefore, parents may choose to send their child to a school, not for its academic record but other criteria such as the school’s ability to allow each child his or her uniqueness, their child’s happiness, because of established friendships, because there is no choice geographically and that it

is their nearest school or because of the school's reputation (Hughes et al, 1994).

In the light of the fact that the government is targeting £22 million at sixty five local authorities to reduce class sizes to thirty (Lepkowska, 1998), many parents may need to think even more carefully when choosing a school. Although schools may use this fund to recruit new staff, there is none for new buildings, and parents may have to take their children to another school if the school of their choice is full, especially as the most crowded classrooms often occur in the most successful schools (TES, 1998). However, Rafferty (1998) reports that parents will be able to send their child to their preferred school if they "can demonstrate that the alternative is either failing or compares unfavourably". This may result in appeals panels becoming log-jammed.

***Correspondence between Lorraine and her mum:***

January 1995

Dear 'Granny',

I'm in the most frightful dilemma! We've just had a letter from the school near the library telling us that Stacey is starting school there after Easter. Her friend Samantha is going to the other school and we'd thought she'd be going there with her. Now we don't know what to do. My understanding was that it's the school for this area. It has a good name - we even moved here because it has such a good reputation! I can remember the estate agent telling us that several people had moved here because of the school.

Stacey's white rabbit . . .

Lorraine

January 1995

Dear Lorraine,

You're not to worry so much, but you must get the right school because getting a good start is so important, isn't it? I had a leaflet through the door the other day that said "you can say which school you would prefer your child to go to". [DFE, 1994, p. 9]. I don't think your Dad and I could do that for you when you started. And it certainly wasn't like that when I started school. My mum took me along on the first day of school and left me with my brother in the playground.

You'll need to go and look at both schools and make up your own mind which one is right for you and Stacey. Pick the school with care and match Stacey to the school rather than the school that you want to her.

Your dad said . . .

Mum

January 1995

Dear 'Granny',

You were absolutely right about going to look. The only problem was that we didn't really know what to look for or what to ask! We looked at both schools and spent an hour in each. We went to the school by the library first of all but I don't think she could cope with the headmaster, he would put her off for life! She's got to like him. Anyway the headmaster at the other school was ever so nice. He gave us a pamphlet about the school and showed us round and the teacher of the little ones was lovely. We liked the feel of the place and all the children seemed happy. Anyway it's slightly nearer than the other one and we've heard lots of good things about it. We saw all the children working, so we asked about how they teach them. Then we remembered that there'd been something in the local paper about education cuts so we asked about how many children were going to be in the class.

We read the booklet through when we got home. It's very useful and written in everyday English. It showed us what life is going to be like for her and answered most of our questions. In some respects it would've been helpful to have had the information long before she started. As a parent sometimes you don't know what to do and you don't always know that you're doing the right thing. I'm certainly more aware

of education now. I take much more notice when things are on the radio. Before it wouldn't concern me, but now!

Stacey's getting very excited about going . . .

Lorraine

## ***DISCUSSION***

My data indicates that the main reasons that parents chose the particular school that they did was because of the geographical location (62%) and the reputation of the school (52%). For those who looked around the school before deciding, it was also to do with the ethos of the school (22%). For 16% it was important that their children were with their friends. Many parents gave more than one reason for choosing their child's school so the percentages add up to more than 100%.

For 48% of parents the choice of school was not an issue, simply because they had chosen it for their first born and their subsequent children attended. Two of these parents have children who are now in their teens who had gone through the system and still chose to send the younger siblings there.

Parents who talked about a "good reputation" were not always clear about what it meant other than they wanted to send their children there, and had done so for a number of years, even though there had been a recent change of headteacher at School B and, as a result, the ethos of the school had



changed. None of the parents mentioned academic results as being part of this reputation, rather it was to do with the perceived relationships within the school, the feel of the place and whether or not their child would maintain their uniqueness. Quality as they perceived it, was seen as the school taking time for their child and genuinely caring about them and their well-being. Those with older children at School A talked about the high levels of involvement of the headteacher and secretary; at School B it was the caring nature of the reception class teachers.

Pre-registration visits to schools were made by 66% of parents. If parents are to make an informed decision about choosing a school for their child then they need to be aware of the questions to ask and what to look for when being shown around the school. Although there are several books on the market about what to look for (for example Woolfson, 1995; Anderson et al, 1989; Jones, 1994; and Basham, 1988), no parents in my study had prepared questions to ask on the pre-registration visit and only a few had actually read any literature in order to prepare themselves for the visit. None made notes during the visits. Many parents (48%) had visited not because they were making a decision but because they already had a child at the school and therefore had visited the school on a daily basis, taking and collecting their other child(ren).

When asked if they were now more aware of educational issues 68% of parents felt that with the approach of their child starting school they 'tuned

in' to educational events in the media much more readily than they had before. 12% mentioned that they felt in control and acted as a consumer in choosing a school for their child. 14% considered the notion of partnership of more importance. Only 6% had not thought about educational issues or the notion of consumerism in connection to education.

The induction co-ordinator at School A, who was the headteacher, felt that "it isn't necessary to market the school. Because of its reputation it markets itself." She said that she actively markets the school when parents visit and "lots of time goes on showing them round because the initial reception is crucial". At School B the induction co-ordinator, a reception class teacher, visits the local playgroups and enters a float in the local carnival as "they see us involved in the village life and it's a good PR exercise". She also lives in the locality and sees this as an advantage because prospective parents "see me at out of school activities and I get to know their children".

### ***Conclusions***

Looking at schools is complex. As such parents might find it necessary to structure their thoughts prior to visiting, but also to use 'gut feeling' before choosing a school for their child(ren). A minority of parents chose schools on issues of academic quality. Proximity, 'ethos' and social reasons prevail. Although only 6% had not thought about education as a market, the large majority did not use academic output as the first criterion.

Schools may need to treat potential parents as partners even before their children begin school. They may need to market their appreciation of children's individuality rather than the school's performance. Perhaps if schools are sensitive and responsive to parents' needs and consider their role in educating parents about their school, even before parents begin to contemplate schools for their children, parents may become better informed about their choice of school with regard to its style and effectiveness of education. This would help to avoid the problem that many parents may have whereby they have to make quick decisions because they had not thought through the issues early enough.

### *Summary*

- *Schools are in a market place culture.*
- *Markets are localised.*
- *The government expect parents to make choices based on evidence of schools' performance.*
- *New funding arrangements for class sizes may mean that parental choice is reduced.*

#### *My research found that:*

- *Some families moved into the area as a result of estate agents recommending the school.*
- *Location is the single most important factor in parental choice of school.*
- *Not all parents were looking for the same thing and their choice was often based on instinct rather than logic.*
- *Many parents were not sure what to look for or what to ask when viewing a school.*
- *The quality and reputation of a school, from the parents' view, was to do with the nature of the people that they came into contact with at the school rather than academic results. This also influenced choice.*
- *Induction co-ordinators thought that high profile marketing was not needed in order to attract clients.*
- *Educating parents about the school may be an important factor in marketing a school.*

## 4.2.

### PREPARING FOR SCHOOL

**“It’s a big separation, leaving your home. They need to be gently helped. I have to make the best of it. It’s a mixed feeling phase.”  
(Parent at School A, January 1995)**

In this section we are introduced to Lorraine’s friend Debbie whose daughter is starting at School A after Easter 1995. They are going to listen to a radio programme which investigates the preparations that children and their parents make before starting school. This is the pre-liminal stage in van Genneep’s theory which includes aspects of preparation and separation.

When I was interviewing parents of the Easter intake 1995, most of them mentioned concern about education spending cuts which might take place as a result of the local government’s reduced Standard Spending Assessment. This suggested a reduction of teachers and therefore larger class sizes. Parents had read about this in the local press and the local radio also played an important part in keeping parents informed. As my data indicates that radio may have an influence on thinking with regard to education issues, this chapter uses the medium of a radio programme to explore findings and issues concerning:

- 4.2.1 preparations for school;
- 4.2.2 home visits;
- 4.2.3 expectations of partnership; and
- 4.2.4 separation.

Some of these aspects will be revisited in more detail in later chapters. For example, partnership between parents and school, and learning at home before the start of school are both addressed further in Chapter 4.6

The chapter opens with Lorraine leaving a message on Debbie’s answer-phone and is followed by a radio programme which uses the data that I gathered to discuss the above issues. The characters within the programme are created from the data but I have also include myself in the text in order to give myself a voice in the discussion. The review of the literature follows, in the form of notes to accompany the programme, this is followed by a discussion of the findings before Debbie leads us into the next chapter.

***Lorraine's phone message to Debbie:***

Hi, Deb, Lorraine. It's 10.30 on Monday morning. I thought I'd just give you a call to tell you that there's a radio programme on this morning at 11.00 about preparing for school. I hope you're back in time to hear it. Speak to you soon, bye.

***The radio programme has just begun:***

. . . are discussing preparations as children approach the beginning of school.

*Presenter:* Good morning. What did you do to help your son or daughter in the lead up to school? How did you prepare them? Did you get a home visit from the school? Did you have concerns about how your child would cope? And how did you cope with your own feelings? These are some of the questions that face parents as they approach the start of school with their children.

I would like to welcome our studio guests this morning, who are Alison, whose son Adam is just about to start school, Graham, whose daughter Sophie has been at school now for two terms, Jane, a reception class teacher and Hilary Fabian who has been researching these questions as part of her Ph.D.

Let's start with you, Alison. Your son, Adam, is looking forward to starting school in September and you feel that you've played a major part in preparing him. What sort of things have you done to help him?

*Alison:* We've talked a lot about it as a family and been on a special shopping trip to buy the uniform. I put his name tags in and he's practised trying it on and we videoed him. He wanted an alarm clock so we bought him one and he practised getting up early. We bought a bag and his PE kit and a lunch box and . . .

*Presenter:* Certainly a costly business.

*Alison:* Yes, and playgroup helped prepare him, too. It's given him confidence. He's made friends and learnt to mix with others. They made sure that . . .

*Graham:* We found that playgroup didn't prepare Sophie at all. OK, it helped with social skills but there was no structure; they didn't have to

finish if they didn't want to and at school they have discipline. She found it difficult to make the change from playing to sitting. The school doesn't know the playgroup, they should work hand in hand, it would help when they started school.

*Presenter:* Not all schools have links with their local playgroups and therefore wouldn't be able to find out about individual children. What happens at your school Jane?

*Jane:* We have some links with the local playgroup but we don't have time to visit them all. We get informal reports when the children start and . . .

*Presenter:* You say that you can't visit them all but surely in order to provide continuity each establishment needs detailed information and a working knowledge of each other and you need to know something about all the children when they start? Should it be part of the school's job to make home visits?

*Jane:* Because we're in a village we tend to know our families quite well, and it would be unnecessary unless it's a special case, but it is something we've thought about and might try. I've done it before and found it useful but with the number of children it's almost impossible . . .

*Graham:* I think it would be wonderful, they would see the children on a one-to-one basis in their own environment and meet the teacher before they started. It would be very good for a first time parent, otherwise you give your child over to the unknown and have to trust that they're okay.

*Alison:* It would be a lot of work for teachers, their place is in the school, not the home. I find the way we go there for visits suits me fine. There's quite enough interference already.

*Graham:* But they don't get a true picture unless they see each child in their own home, they'd get so much insight. . . .

*Alison:* But it would be confusing for the child to see the teacher in different contexts, they should put the resources into the school . . . .

*Presenter:* I'd like to bring you in here, Hilary. I believe that you conducted some research recently with Chris Stelling, [Stelling and Fabian, 1996], a reception class teacher in Cheshire, on home visiting. Is there any value in teachers visiting children in their own homes before they start?

*Hilary:* Our research, which looked at the introduction of a home visiting scheme, suggests that children settle more quickly if they've had home visits, as the teacher is known to them and so they feel more secure when they start school. Parents felt more in control of the situation in their own homes because they could talk more freely without other mums and dads

listening in, and the teacher gained specific information before the child started school. Also, children could see that their parents and teacher are working together for their benefit. However, the parents I've been interviewing about the induction to school certainly reflect the mixed reaction that Alison and Graham have shown and my findings indicate that parents appreciate that teachers just don't have time to make home visits.

*Presenter:* What about from the school's point of view?

*Hilary:* I found that where staff knew the children beforehand through contact with the family they have found it helpful in understanding the child's perception of the world and found that it helped with forming the beginning of the partnership between home and school.

*Presenter:* How do you start to develop early partnerships at your school Jane?

*Jane:* School is keen to develop a partnership with home. This starts with the children visiting school before they begin full time. When they've started we talk daily with parents, we have little chats first thing in the morning and after school. We also encourage them to come in and help. Some want to help but want their children to settle first. At a school near us they invite parents for lunch, but we haven't tried that. The reading record is useful, parents comment, for example, if a child's coming to school in tears that day they can explain why in the book - perhaps a pet has died or something.

*Graham:* We find them useful but there isn't always a comment, and when there is, we don't always understand the comments from teachers or we see parent helpers writing in it which isn't very helpful.

*Jane:* We want to help and encourage parents in their children's learning and involve them. We can put positive feedback in the reading record books and, if I'm worried about something, I can put a comment in to ask them to come in.

The PTA also helps build the partnership and makes them feel needed and have a say but we don't put pressure on parents to attend.

*Presenter:* Alison, what are you expecting with regard to partnership?

*Alison:* I don't know the set up but I expect I'll join the parent-teachers so I know what's going on. I'll probably go into school and help out and I'd like to be asked to go on trips . . .

*Presenter:* Anything else that you'd like Alison?

*Alison:* I'd like them to be honest and keep me informed. I'm not sure what to expect but a weekly report would be useful to see if he's keeping up. I



hope they would take me aside and tell me if he weren't doing well. You need to know the problems so that you can help. I want to know how he's behaving. I hope they guide us 'cos I'll want to know the things he needs help with. I'd like to think they'll involve me. I'd like them to tell me what to do so there's no conflict, so we're doing it the same.

Presenter: So, you're looking to the school to take the initiative?

Alison: Yes.

Presenter: Graham do you feel the same?

Graham: Yes, I want them to involve us but it's a partnership of common goals so it's our responsibility too. It's a two-way thing, we support what the school does but it's about communication between the teacher and the parents.

Presenter: Thankyou. You both seem to want the school to involve you and expect to have a partnership with school on a number of levels. Now, Alison talked earlier about some of the things that she's bought to help Adam before he starts school. But surely, as parents you're probably going to worry about whether or not your child will cope with other children, be able to make choices and tell you how they feel. Graham, how did you prepare Sophie to cope with these aspects of school?

Graham: Before she started we read her books about school and talked to her about what it would be like. We read some books for us too which gave suggestions for things we could do at home. We walked past school and learnt the route. We took any opportunities to go and see it, for example there was a fete we went to. We had her friends round who were starting with her, worked our way through the exercises in some educational books we bought. But it would have been nice to have talked to parents who went up last year who could have told us what to do and expect. Those with older brothers and sisters have an advantage - I don't see any problems with our younger one starting.

Presenter: Hilary what are your views?

Hilary: Alison mentioned earlier about buying the uniform. My research found this to be an important element of preparation - a rite of passage - leading to the start of school. Graham talked about developing friendships which is important in helping children to learn to accept others, adjust their own perspective, follow others' initiatives and to create their own. Developing knowledge about people and social flexibility will help them to cope. But they also need experiences of places. They need to visit places and see different environments as well as meet different people to give them a wide variety of experiences. You also need to play with your child and have fun. They need to enjoy their childhood, focusing on what they can do

at the moment rather than rushing through it. In this way you're preparing them for the next stage while enjoying the life-stage that they're at.

*Alison:* Yes, I agree, and I don't want to set home up as an extra school but I feel I need support in other things like writing and learning the alphabet. I think we've done it all wrong and I won't know until he starts school.

*Graham:* Yes, in some respects it would have been helpful to have had information before she started. We needed to know at an early stage the basic information on what the school wanted us to do, things like the way they do the alphabet, advice on the style of writing, and so on. What books they recommend. There are so many on the market, there's too much choice. Children want to learn at a much earlier stage and we're not sure what's best. In the library we're not sure which books to work from. It would've been helpful if we'd had a list of books which would tie in with the first books at school. Like Alison said, you don't want them to start and then be told 'you should have done these things twelve months ago'.

*Presenter:* You obviously feel very strongly about this Graham. Jane, what do you do about this?

*Jane:* Some parents want too much, too soon. Some have no idea and it's all a bit of a mystery for them, others have read up on everything - they seem to want their child to have a reading book on the first day; they don't realise the value of picture books and talking. The head talks to them during the induction but they often don't listen or take in what's being said, although they're eager to see what's going on.

We get questions about reading when they first start and pages of sums that they've done at home - they want them on 'proper' reading schemes - there's competition between families. I think it's because of the Parents Charter [DFE, 1994], they can go out and buy the National Curriculum and they think they know it all, they take it in isolation, not in context. I suppose we could send the school booklet out earlier.

*Presenter:* It certainly makes sense to support them with the process of starting school but what about support for the family? Graham, how did you and your wife cope when Sophie started school and particularly with the first day and the first separation?

*Graham:* We wanted to make the most of the day before she started, so we had a special treat - we went out to McDonald's. That night she had a bath and hairwash and laid out the uniform and the special hair ribbon that our friend had sent her with the ABC on. It was a happy-sad time for us but she was ready for school.

I'd taken the day off work. On the first morning she was up and dressed by six thirty. She was so proud and pleased to be in her uniform and feeling

very grown up. I wanted to get there early so she was one of the first, so it wasn't too crowded. We took a photograph of her by the door of her classroom then she just kissed us goodbye and went straight in. She looked very vulnerable and we hung about to make sure she was OK. We were lucky, we saw some others making a tremendous fuss but we felt that the school would let us know if there was a problem or if she was distressed.

*Presenter:* And how did you feel?

*Graham:* That first day was quite stressful for us, it was more upsetting for us than it was for Sophie. *(laugh)*. My wife had an enormous sense of loss at the beginning, she felt that she'd lost a friend. She kept looking at the clock and wondering what Sophie was doing and if she was all right. She wasn't able to picture her in the situation. In fact even yesterday she said she looked down and Sophie wasn't there and she felt as if part of her was missing. You see, all of a sudden there was lots of space and time. What it did was give her an opportunity to focus her efforts on the younger one at home.

*Presenter:* Did the school support you in any way with this loss?

*Graham:* No, we didn't expect them to, it's a personal thing - just provide plenty of hankies! *(laugh)* Some of my wife's friends have gone back to work or started a course or something.

*Presenter:* But aren't there informal support mechanisms between parents such as when you go to collect the children and meet at the school gates?

*Graham:* Yes, but because I work I'm not there often enough. In fact, it's only just recently that I've realised that the gate is a social meeting place and I've started to match children to parents, but it's nice to think that we're a community. My wife finds the network of friends at the gate supportive, she knows who to find things out from and if she has any worries she talks to them and they share concerns. It can be very lonely at the gate if you don't know anyone. Meeting other parents during the visits was important, too.

*Alison:* I'm sure it'll be nice to meet the other parents so I'll know who he's mixing with and know who to invite back for tea. I suppose it's important that children see you talking - they see that it's okay to be friends with that person's child.

*Graham:* Perhaps there needs to be a support group for the parents, especially if it's the last child.

*Presenter:* Did you find anything else hard to cope with at the start of school?

*Graham:* No, but after she'd been at school for a while we found it difficult that the teacher knew Sophie better than we did! I feel quite jealous, really. The school has her for the biggest part of the day and I have no control over her development and we're not the main influence any more.

*Presenter:* Okay, thank you for that. Now, let's look at this problem of children not being able to cope on their first day. They've had lots of preparatory visits, they're familiar with the place, you've talked to them and done all the right things, and then on the first day they cling or scream. Alison, I believe you're not looking forward to Adam's first morning.

*Alison:* No, I'm dreading it! What if he suddenly goes shy and tearful at the door and refuses to go in? It's just as nerve wracking as it is exciting. It puts pressure on parents who see all the others doing it right and you ask why doesn't mine? What's wrong with me? I'll need to show a brave face but inside . . . what message is that giving? If Adam sees that I'm happy to send him away he'll think that I don't want him.

*Graham:* Yes, my wife cried on the night before but she didn't let Sophie see that. We tried to make it clear to her that it was not our choice that she went but that she had to go. But I think because we felt confident that she would cope then she knew she had nothing to worry about.

*Presenter:* Jane?

*Jane:* It's awkward on the first morning as it's a bit chaotic and no-one knows what to do . . . The children are our first priority and we try to settle them as soon as possible. The parents are the ones that worry and upset the children. At the end of the first day I go out and make a general announcement that 'we've all had a lovely day' and reassure any parents who were worried earlier.

*Presenter:* Some schools have a staggered start or the children only attend part-time for a few weeks. Hilary, I believe that at one of the schools where you did your research the children just stayed for the morning during the first week. How did that work?

*Hilary:* Yes, that's right. They went home after lunch. Of the twenty five parents I talked with, sixteen thought that it was a good idea and that it helped their children to settle and get used to lunch, although there was also a feeling of missing out. Of the others, parents thought it unsettled their children, particularly those with older brothers and sisters, as they then had to go back to school again to collect them. There were a few who thought that their children would view school as a part-time affair, especially as they had had several preparatory visits which could also be seen as part-time school. It came as quite a shock to some to go for five days, all day, the following week.

*Presenter:* Thankyou. Finally Graham, you probably feel an old hand at this now, what advice would you give to parents of children who are just about to start school?

*Graham:* Have realistic expectations, take each day as it comes, stay relaxed and don't pressure them, if you get anxious they will too. And once they've started get involved, keep in touch with the teacher and talk to the teacher if you have any worries.

*Presenter:* Thankyou everyone. Today we've heard about a potentially stressful social situation and the way in which it is tackled. If you would like more information about the issues under discussion you can send for the accompanying notes by sending a stamped addressed envelope to . . . .



### **Supplementary notes for “Preparing for School”**

Hilary Fabian

These notes aim to give some information from the literature to support the main issues discussed during the radio programme. These include preparation for school which takes place in pre-school settings and in the home, home visiting, expectations of the home/school partnership and ways in which children and parents can be supported during separation at the start of school.

#### **4.2.1. PREPARATIONS FOR SCHOOL**

A survey of children starting school by Barrett (1986) tells of the ways that parents try to prepare their children for the approach of school by talking about it and shopping for new “shoes, bags or other clothing especially bought, made and labelled for school.” (Barrett 1986, p.28). Brown and

Cleave (1994, p. 3) however, point out that starting school “is not just about having a new school bag and arriving at the beginning of the new term”, parents’ educative preparations are also important. SCAA point out:

“Children’s experiences at home are highly significant to achievement. Parents significantly influence their children’s learning.”

(SCAA 1996, p.7)

Although parents may be keen to help their children they may not always value or recognise the learning experiences that they offer them through play. Atkin (1991) suggests that:

“some adults distrust the fact that play is not directly utilitarian. Because it does not serve particular goals directly it often seems to them to be an inefficient way of learning . . . . Correcting punctuation and learning the alphabet will teach children more efficiently and quickly, won’t it? The fact that play has been shown to foster creativity, problem solving, lateral thinking, etc., is too nebulous for these people.”

(Atkin 1991, p.31)

Nutbrown (1994, pp.130-31) found parents’ views of the part they played in their child’s learning fell into three categories:

- “Parents who did not recognise the things they did as helping their children to learn.
- Parents who felt that they helped ‘informally’ at home.
- Parents who felt they did a lot to help their children to learn but felt that the benefits of nursery education enhanced what they could do.”

Hannon and James (1990) suggest that often parents who are not given constructive advice muddle through with the uneasy feeling that they are doing it wrong. Nutbrown notes that:

“Parents who are informed in some way about the ways in which children learn, think about and represent their thoughts through talk, drawing and action are in a better position to support the continuity and progression of their

children's learning and development between home and nursery, school or other group setting."

(Nutbrown 1994, pp.131-132)

This is supported by Meighan and Siraj-Blatchford (1997, p.43) who suggest that parents may become competent teachers of their children given "support, advice and guidance".

The Headstart programme (Berrueta-Clement et al 1984 and NCB, 1995) and research into other parental participation programmes (Schweinhart et al, 1986) have made it clear that the long term effects of children's development and success are a result of early parent-child interaction, the active participation of parents in their children's learning process and the expectations they have of their children (Sylva and Moss, 1992).

Parents' culturally constituted ideas may also play a central role in the construction of children's learning environments and may help children to be competent members of their culture (Harkness and Super 1994, p.61). This suggests that parents' attitudes to situations may affect their children and influence the starting point of their school experience.

"The way the parent feels about sending the child to school will have a profound effect on the way the child adjusts. If she feels reluctant, unsure or overanxious, she hinders his ability to meet the new situation and grow more independent."

(Read and Patterson 1976, p.138)

Social confidence and success play an important part in giving children self-esteem which will, in turn, help children to approach the start of school in a

positive way (Illsley Clarke, 1997). Preparations for school may also take place in pre-school settings. However,

“well meaning educators can waste time and insult the intellect of young children by requiring them to do things that they will need to do ‘when they go to school’.”

(Nutbrown 1994, p.126 )

Mills and Mills, (1998) suggest that pre-school school staff in Hungary, Switzerland and Belgium see their role as creating “homogeneous groups of children ready for the accelerating formal teaching they will encounter” at school, whereas Curtis (1986, p.154) suggests that what is needed is consistency in routine between settings.

#### **4.2.2. HOME VISITS**

“If positive relationships are to be established between parent and school, they must begin before the child starts.”

(Cleave et al 1982, p.103)

If we were to explore the history of education we would see that there was once a great divide between home and school (Wolfendale, 1989). It was on the recommendation of the Plowden Report (DES, 1967) that schools began to make themselves more accessible to parents. In order to develop home-school relationships Plowden suggested that

“one possibility would be for teachers to ask parents if they would be willing to be visited at home, and if they were, to do so.”

(DES 1967, para.113).

There is now a recognition of the primacy of parents as the first educators of their children (DES, 1967; DES, 1977; DES, 1990; and Ball, 1994) and that if teachers are to develop understanding about each family’s goals and



needs, then they must really get to know each family and to view parents as learners about school (Barbour, 1995). When parents

“are involved at these early stages in children’s education, they will be more likely to both understand and support the school system”.

(Curtis 1986, p.160)

Home visits might help practitioners to enhance their knowledge about children’s previous learning and help them to build upon past experiences. They might also aid appreciation of diversity and raise awareness of different cultural expectations, thus helping teachers to recognise differences as well as the common interests of families and become more aware of parenting behaviours which might conflict with teacher expectation. The present changing context of the family (Fthenakis, 1997), probably results in the need for more support and access to advice, which home visits might be able to provide. Nevertheless, home visiting remains a contentious issue. Bastiani (1993, p.22) warns that

“the issue of contact with parents in their own homes, mainly through the practice of home visits, is one that appears to divide teacher opinion sharply and deeply.”

It is a skilled and difficult task in which many teachers may be ill-equipped to feel comfortable in a stranger’s home, equally, it might put pressure on families (Cohen, 1988). Dowling (1995, p. 23) highlights that there has been little research on children’s reactions to home visits but that work done by Cousins (1990) indicates that they value the opportunity for a personal link. Robson (1996, p.67) cites an NFER study of 1991 as

showing that nearly four fifths of parents in that study were in favour of home visiting.

#### **4.2.3. EXPECTATIONS OF PARTNERSHIP**

The parent is the one constant element in the child's experience during the transition process (DES, 1990; and Miller, 1994), and it is

“the equality of involvement or partnership between parents and educators which is likely to determine effectiveness of continuity”

(DES 1990, para.106).

This, therefore, is a strong case for ensuring that parents are an integral part of the induction process and for parents and teachers to establish an early effective partnership. Dowling (1988, p.85) advises that this points to the need for staff to plan ways of keeping parents in touch and to be sensitive to their needs. Although opportunities for partnership might be created, and parents might have read the Parent's Charter (DES, 1994) they might be unsure what to expect because they are new to their role or they may not have the confidence to ask.

The focus of parental rights in this country is on individual rather than collective rights (Bastiani, 1995, p.9) with a number of common expectations outlined by Bastiani (1995).

“They want:

- the best for their children - in schooling, as in everything else. This means for most, a high quality, broad education, in a caring, effective institution
- regular, reliable and accessible information about what the school is up to and how this affects their child(ren)

- information about their children's progress and achievements, about problems and, especially, help in identifying ways in which they themselves can support their children's learning
- finally, most parents want to be taken seriously - to have a say and be listened to, to contribute to the life and work of the school and to their child's part in it."

#### **4.2.4. SEPARATION**

Pascal (1990, p.1) portends that first impressions and memories of school "remain with us and may still affect our behaviour many years later". Therefore, it is important to ensure that any separation problems which have the potential for upsetting children are anticipated and dealt with sensitively, and that children are supported and helped to cope.

Apart from the question of whether children are mature enough and ready to be themselves without the support of their parents at this age (Blenkin, 1996), there may be several other reasons for possible distress at the start of school. Children may have experienced little more than their home surroundings and the people who exist and enter into that world. Palmer (1971, p.37) observes that many children may not have experienced separation previously and this may be the first lengthy separation from their parents. It might be that there is a particularly strong bond between the child and parent and the child may worry how their parent(s) will cope without them (Waksler 1996, p.145). Cleave et al state that the key

"seems to lie in avoiding the shock of anything *sudden* in the way of sights, sounds or experiences, and in introducing everything *gradually* in an atmosphere of unhurried calm."

(Cleave et al 1982, p.121)

Indeed, Plowden's words are still as pertinent today as they were three decades ago:

"Children, like adults, enjoy and are stimulated by novelty and change. The first day of school, the transfer to 'big school', are landmarks in the process of growing up. Even when children are apprehensive, they look forward to change . . . . But if change is to stimulate and not dishearten, it must be carefully prepared and not too sudden."

(DES 1967, para.427)

Although starting school may be seen as an exciting step, excitement can easily turn to anxiety if not supported. Pedagogical hints to ease the initial separation for children have been suggested by Dowling (1988) and Woolfson (1998). For example, half days, a staggered start, practising separation, staying with child for a short time and reassuring the child that their parent will return. However, support networks and coping strategies may also be needed for parents during separation as feelings such as 'losing' their child and having to learn how to cope without them might occur (Elfer, 1997).

"A way to help parents might be to include them more fully in the induction into school and give *them* an induction into its nature and the possible levels of their involvement. This might be through parent conferences where they can begin to evolve the nature of the partnership with school."

(Fabian 1996, p.20)

Parents might then be able to take a greater role in preparing their children for school and develop strategies as a team to cope with the start of school. However,

"parent activities need to be responsive to the language and culture of the family and be tailored to meet specific needs

of teen parents, single parents, working parents, blended families, and families with special service needs.”

(Lombardi, 1992)

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Preparations for School**

In my study I found that some preparation for school took place through family discussions and looking at children's books about school. Buying equipment and clothing such as lunch boxes, uniform and PE kit were seen as an important element of preparation but there was doubt about knowing how to prepare in other ways. Thus, buying items became a form of displacement activity for many parents. Parents play a crucial role in preparing their child for school, not just with outward signs such as lunch boxes and other physical paraphernalia but in giving their child a mental picture of what might happen during the day. Although they may want to give their child a picture of life at school they only have their own experiences to draw on, and these may not be what would meet their child on arrival at school.

Parents wanted to know the 'right' way to prepare and felt inadequate about learning processes and helping their child to gain knowledge. Parents felt more confident with subsequent children starting school. Early links and effective communication between school and home about child development to inform play situations might help to further parents' understanding and expectations of their children and build their confidence

as educators. This may also encourage parents to see the developmental value of the things that their child will do when they start school.

Most children were involved in choosing their uniform. They rehearsed getting ready for school by trying on their uniform, getting up early or walking to school. Older brothers and sisters helped to inform their younger siblings about school by telling them of their experiences.

85% of parents saw pre-school settings as giving their children social confidence although parents did not see playgroups as preparing their child well for school in other aspects. For example a typical response was

“it’s the same at two and half as it is at four and a half. They should provide some stimulation for the older children. They need to sit down in small groups and do colours and letters”  
(Parent AS7)

Other parents were concerned that children were not encouraged to behave or complete activities at playgroup. Neither school had formal links with their local pre-schools. School B had informal links with three playgroups. Between them the two schools received children from about fifteen different settings. 96% of parents thought that there should be close liaison between the school and pre-school settings. One playgroup leader said

“I talk about going to school and encourage them to put their clothes on. They won’t take their shoes and socks off because they know I won’t put them on for them. I can’t really tell them about school because I’m conscious of telling them things that aren’t there. We would like to see more of our children visiting school. I’d like school to come and see what we’re doing”

The school decided when or if they would visit and if they invited children to visit school. There were no records passed from the pre-schools to the schools. The pre-school considered that they helped parents with the transition to school by telling parents that their child was ready for school.

### Home Visits

Neither school made home visits. 82% of parents liked the idea of home visits before the children started school but thought that they would be time consuming and costly. Of those who did not want visits, typical perceptions were that “it was most unnatural” or that “there’s enough interference already”. To develop an early partnership, home visiting may be an opportunity to give parents an understanding of their children’s learning as well as providing the foundation for on-going participation in their child’s school life. By starting the partnership on their territory perhaps parents might relate to their child’s teacher in a positive way, and understand and appreciate more about the teacher’s aims for their children. Equally, the teacher might find out more about what the child’s achievements. This may help the child become incorporated into the class and assume their role of pupil quickly. But are home visits necessary? Would teachers need time and training to work with parents in their home?

### Expectations of Partnership

Parents were used to a close partnership with pre-school settings but were not expecting the same contact when their children started school. However, they were unsure as to what partnership comprised and were

expecting the school to give them direction. The schools saw partnership as giving access to the teacher before and after school to talk through problems, having a reading record diary, holding parents' evenings, having a Parent Teacher/Friends of the School Association and parents helping in the classroom.

The start of school has the potential for establishing sound parental expectations for the partnership between home and school. Parents and teachers may want to seek opportunities to develop this partnership in the earliest stages of induction in order to understand each other's worlds. Parents might feel happier if they have a clear role to play. For example, as experts about their children, they are able to give critical information about their children's learning at home which could be used to help plan the curriculum at the start of school. Are entry profiles used for this purpose? (see Chapter 4.4.) Without this partnership and sharing of dialogue the different views of teachers and parents may well hinder the child's progress.

A mentor family with a child who started school the previous year might also help parents to understand school and the induction process better. This interaction and collaboration might also help to develop a sense of community among families.

### Separation

All parents and children viewed the start of school as a major step in life.

30% of families marked the lead up to the initial separation with a



ceremony by having a special treat on the day before school started. However, 22% wanted the day before to be a quiet one. The first morning at school held great significance. Many celebrated it by taking a photograph of their child in their uniform. 11% of parents took time off work to see their child into school on the first day.

All the children were admitted together, starting the day at the same time as the rest of the school. Although all the children went into school without any difficulties many parents recognised “the trembly lip” or “he just dismissed us” as their children putting on a brave face. 98% of parents felt a sense of loss as their children started school. Several talked about feeling physically ill or equated it with a bereavement. Some parents had prepared for this through enrolling on courses or seeking part-time employment to ensure that their time would be occupied. There was also a general feeling of loss that parents were no longer sharing their child’s world and the experiences that they were having. Several parents, particularly mothers said that they would miss their children because they had become ‘like a friend’ or a ‘good pal’. Many parents felt that they had given up their cultural influence on their child’s development and had to put their trust in others. Transition for parents is discussed further in Chapter 4.6.

The start of school marks a life change for families. Some children may not be aware that separation will happen regardless nor have some looked beyond their first day at school. If children cannot cope emotionally with

the first days they are unlikely to engage fully in the life of school and may therefore under perform academically or have behavioural problems. Children's emotional well being is discussed further in Chapter 4.5. The start of school is also an emotional transition for parents and, for many, this takes place on a daily basis as they leave their child at school each day. Should schools be preparing parents too for the initial separation and providing support mechanisms for them? Would this help to evolve a better partnership?

***E-mail from Debbie:***

From <debbie@virgin.net>  
To: <lorraine@btinternet.com>  
Date: January 1995

Dear Lorraine,  
Thanks for telling me about the programme. I really enjoyed it. I did all those things for James before he started. What did you think about that bit when she asked them about their worries? They didn't answer it did they?

That poor women who was dreading the first day of term! They should have told her that it takes time and that it's a gradual thing and if they get a calm, patient teacher they'll be alright. James took his blanket with him and had a photo of us in his pocket, but it still took him a few weeks to settle. I think being able to wear his long trousers helped him the most. But I'll tell you all about him settling in another time. I'm confident that Hayley will settle because she goes every day to meet James and she knows that we're expecting her to be okay.

They didn't mention anything about these cuts. They really worry me. Will the class size get bigger do you think? They might have to go into the classes that are already there and they're different ages. These SATs worry me too. I hope they tell us about them soon because James does them next term.  
Love Deb.

### *Summary*

#### *The literature highlights:*

- *Physical and educative preparations for school.*
- *Home visiting is a contentious issue.*
- *Equality of partnership is likely to assist continuity.*
- *Separation might cause upset for children and parents.*

#### *My research found that:*

- *Buying equipment and clothing were important elements of preparation.*
- *Parents were unsure as to how to prepare their children in educative ways.*
- *Parents thought that playgroup helped with social confidence.*
- *The majority of parents would welcome home visiting.*
- *Parents look to the school to take the initiative in partnership.*
- *Families saw the start of school as an important occasion.*
- *Parents felt a sense of loss when their children started school.*
- *Having a picture of their parents or of the home environment helped children to settle.*

### 4.3.

## CONCERNS ABOUT STARTING SCHOOL

**“I hope she’ll be happy. I’m worried to death that I’ll leave her where she doesn’t want to be.”**

**(Parent at School B, March 1995)**

In the summer of 1995 an article appeared in a local newspaper reporting the use of School B’s playing field as a meeting place for drug-taking. The induction co-ordinator at School B was concerned that it would upset parents (journal 4.7.95). It was clear that the local press was a source of information about school and, in this instance, had fuelled anxieties about potential problems.

During the initial interview with fifty parents I asked about their hopes and fears for their children. In the light of the above I decided that the medium of a newspaper article would be a suitable vehicle for presenting the findings from the data about parental concerns over:

- 4.3.1. the physical environment
- 4.3.2. the social environment

These are areas of concern identified by the literature, other areas are raised by the respondents in my study. Some aspects are also explored in Chapter 4.4.2. Discipline, another area of concern, is discussed in Chapter 4.5.

Let us first examine some current views from the literature on ‘trouble spots’ at the start of school. This is followed with the composite findings from my data in the form of a newspaper article and ends with a discussion before an e-mail from Debbie takes us into the next chapter.

School can be a potentially frightening place for young children, particularly for those who have had no pre-school experience. Curtis (1986) identified four areas in which children may experience a lack of continuity which could lead to anxiety and distress and thus hinder learning.

“The first and most obvious, is the change in the physical environment and how it affects the child’s movements; the second relates to the differences in classroom organisation in the two environments. The last two are . . . that of curriculum content and the differing ideologies of the pre-school and infant educators.”

(Curtis 1986, p.147)

Dowling (1988, p.28) considers the school building, daily routines, the learning experience and the ratio of adults to be the main causes of anxiety to young children.

#### **4.3.1. THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**

Our physical surroundings have a significant influence on the way we behave. Cleave et al (1982, p.39) identified three features of the environment which are critical for children, whatever their previous experience:

“the *scale* of the child’s setting, the *range* of his territory, and the limitations on his *movements* within it.”

Children coming straight from home may be overwhelmed by the scale of the building (Marshall, 1988). Those children who have attended playgroups usually do so in small self-contained buildings used only by children who are close to each other in age (Woolfson 1993, p.35). The first class of school, on the other hand, is usually part of a larger infant department, and an even larger primary school, comprising a wide range of age groups. This is the case, even in a relatively small (two teacher) school where several age groups are in one class. Even in those schools where the

nursery is part of the school it is likely to be a self-contained unit with few opportunities to explore the rest of the school (Curtis, 1986).

Cleave et al (1982, p.74) point out the amount of differing group sizes that one child in their study experienced during a day:

“assembly (whole school)	360
classroom activities	31
playtime (infants only)	170
special pre-reading group	9
television with another class	60
dinner (first sitting)	110”

#### **4.3.2. THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT**

At home some children may have an adult’s undivided attention or share it with one or two siblings. Due to pupil-teacher ratios (PTRs) in school there are less available adults to child than at pre-school and each child has more peer group relationships to deal with than in the pre-school stage (Cleave and Brown 1991, p.13). This increase in PTRs leads to the expectation from staff that children will do more for themselves such as changing for PE (Curtis 1986, p.153).

“In addition, a new infant pupil moves from being the oldest child in the nursery (ie at the top of the ‘pecking order’) to the youngest child in school (ie at the bottom of the ‘pecking order’)”

(Woolfson 1993, p.13)

One of the features of the physical environment is the playground, but it impacts on the social development of children. Noise and volume of ‘traffic’, sometimes moving at high speed, may make the playground a frightening and stressful place (Ghaye and Pascal 1988, p.16). It can be

difficult for a child to go into “a bare playground after he had had access to play equipment all morning” (Brown and Cleave 1994, p.17), particularly if the child has interrupted playing to ‘go out to play’ (Stevenson, 1988). “The new child in the playground is typically a bystander rather than a participant and his activity level is low” (Cleave et al 1982, p.138).

Cleave and Brown (1991) found mixed answers to the problem of playtime from abolishing it altogether, to new entrants who were expected to join the melee on their pre-entry visits. Flexible playtime may not be easy to implement in a mixed aged class where older children are able to sustain concentration on task for longer periods of time, or it may cause disruption to timetabled outdoor games. Cleave and Brown (1991, p.37) found that children enjoyed playtime and also found that staff needed a break as it was one of the few opportunities they had to talk with colleagues.

Assembly is seen as another area with potential for distress and worry (Brown and Cleave 1994, p.17; Cleave and Brown 1991, p.32; and Dowling 1995, p.18). There is certainly conflict between a gentle start to the day followed by a formal assembly, especially if the hall is situated at a distance from the classroom. Cleave and Brown (1991) note that many children find large group times difficult and question whether it makes sense

“that one of the first experiences of school for many nursery children is attending a special assembly?”  
(Brown and Cleave 1994, p.17)

Lunch time at school is seen as another area of concern particularly in relation to the formality of the system (Cleave et al 1982, p157). Cleave et al state that

“dinner at school represents more than a major discontinuity in the experience of young children: for most of them it is a totally new experience.”

(Cleave et al 1982, p.140)

Cleave and Brown (1991, p.34) suggest that unfamiliar food and cutlery may prove difficult for some children. Indeed, there may be cultural differences in these areas. During the long playtime at lunch time Cleave et al (1982, p.138) found that new children appeared lethargic and listless.

Not only are there organisational differences between pre-school groups and school, but the value of particular methods of learning, particularly play, may be seen in a different light. At school play maybe “relegated to an activity confined to the playground, or a reward for work completed” (Clarke 1989, p.105). Children’s happiness is the general desire for parents and early years practitioners but children also need their thinking challenged and learning to be exciting, with teachers having high expectations of children’s achievements (David et al 1992, p.21).



***Lorraine introduces us to the findings:***

January 1995

Dear Debbie,

You mentioned the things that you're worried about in your e-mail, so when I saw this article in the paper I cut it out for you. It's not just about drugs but all those other things, too. I thought they might have said something about the open-plan building, but they don't. I'm worried that the layout of the classes will distract the children and Stacey will wander off. And I'm concerned about security at lunchtime. I just want her to be happy and fulfil her potential. I hope she doesn't lose her personality and character, I hope they listen to her, too. I don't want her confidence knocked.

See you soon.

Love Lorraine

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# The Gazette

## Newsletter

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Price 25p

January 1995

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### Drugs found on school field

**This week's revelations that spent needles were found on the school field has brought fear to the hearts of parents.**

As a new set of children prepare to start school a number of potential problems await them. Drugs, bullying and open premises are but a few. Playtime, lunch time and assembly cause anxiety in many children. They will also be faced with a wide range of potentially stressful demands such as learning school rules, coping with teacher expectations and developing relationships with new adults.

#### Signs of Anxiety

Valerie Webster (1995), a freelance educational consultant, suggests that this anxiety may manifest itself in a number of ways:

- difficulty talking or eating;
- not co-operating or interacting with others, resulting in lack of friendships;
- difficulty understanding, attending and concentrating;
- blank or worried expression most of the time;
- repetitive, rhythmic or self-destructive habits;
- never volunteers or contributes in class;
- little work done, sits or stands for long periods doing nothing;
- problems separating from parents on arrival;
- tummy upsets or sleep disturbance.

#### Parents' Concerns

Of fifty parents interviewed by Hilary Fabian before their child started school during this academic year, eleven voiced concern over lunchtimes, nine stated the need for firm discipline and nine worried about their child's ability to cope with work and school. Indeed, twenty mentioned that their overriding concern was that their child should be happy.

Recent scares about drugs and bullying are now added to the problem. Ten parents were concerned about bullying. One mum voiced her fears for her son when she said "There's so much publicity about bullying. The last thing I want is for him to be afraid. I worry about bullies and whether he'll be bullied or if he'll be one."

#### Children's Concerns

When twenty four children were interviewed at the end of their reception year, it was found that they all enjoyed playtime, a few found assembly too long and, although some children found lunchtime loud, most of them enjoyed their food and the opportunity to sit with their friends.

#### Help Strategies

As long ago as 1991 Cleave and Brown highlighted concerns about assembly, lunchtimes and playtimes and suggested a series of measures to overcome the difficulties at the start of school.

A teacher at the local school said "It's important that parents see a warm, friendly

environment when their children start school and that we, as teachers, are approachable and human. The children need to meet their teacher and see what big school is all about before they start so it isn't a strange place to come to. When they first start they need to learn the routines. At dinner time there's the routine of going to the toilet, washing hands and lining up. They're expected to conform to acceptable standards of behaviour. Constant repetition helps to lay the ground rules, as well as praising the ones who are doing it right. Sometimes you forget how little they are so we check their birthdays to help put our expectations on a par."

Another teacher said "Playtime's the hardest. They stand and watch. It's overwhelming for them. We do circle time and discuss what they like and what they don't like."

### **Understanding fears**

Fears judged to be imaginary by adults usually have a legitimate basis in children's reality. For example one boy on starting school said "it was very scary and I was frightened 'cos I didn't know anyone there." Yet his mother spoke of him having

made a number of friends before starting school and on the first morning "he just went in. He was totally together and very mature."

The work of Barrett (1986) found that there is a need for children to "learn, know and use 'survival skills' in order to function confidently in the classroom". In a recent study by Hilary Fabian it was found that children watched and asked others or relied on the teacher to tell them what to do, where things were and how to cope with not knowing.

If parents are unaware of the experiences that children may encounter at school, then children may be left on their own to make sense of, come to terms with, or even endure events. This may lead to tension and insecurity, unsatisfactory relationships and a lowering of self-esteem.

When parents and teachers understand children's perspectives, they have a better chance of easing children's distress. Without this understanding and help, children may be left to craft their own solutions.



**DISCUSSION**

The literature and my findings suggest that there are three broad categories of concern:

- ◆ the physical environment;
- ◆ emotional care; and
- ◆ school practices and events

When parents were asked a general question about their hopes and fears for their children at the start of school 22% mentioned lunch time. The main worry was that their child would not eat sufficient food because they would not like the food and as a result become fractious or, because their child was a slow eater that they would be forced to eat their food. However, all the children stayed at school for a school meal or they took sandwiches. Cleave et al (1982, p.141) found that headteachers postponed school meals for the new intake on the first day, whereas in my study the opposite was the case. At School A the headteacher wanted to give the children a gentle start and therefore the children only attended for half a day for the first week but children went home *after* lunch.

40% of parents mentioned that their overriding concern was that their child should be happy at school. Part of this was that their children kept their personality and confidence (18%), that their child would conform and be well-behaved (19%) and that their child would make friends (18%). Other worries were about bullying and/or drugs (20%). The open plan building

was of concern to 12% of parents at School B, particularly in relation to security. In 1997 School B installed a security system and glass fronted reception hatch and School A took measures to tighten security by moving the secretary's office to the main door, again with a glass fronted hatch and security system.

Some of the concerns may have been raised as a result of press attention or by hearsay. This suggests that there may be a role for the school in allaying parents' anxieties before children begin school. It also suggests that there may be a need for teachers to have an induction curriculum in which children are given clear explanations to help them understand the physical nature of their surroundings as well as the social practices within the school.

To: <Lorraine@BTinternet.com>  
From: <Debbie@virgin.net>  
Subject: Worries  
Date: January 1995

Dear Lorraine,  
Thanks for the article. It's very interesting. I was worried about James' Ventalin before he started and what would happen if he became ill during the day, but everything was sorted out at the parents' meeting.

I expect we'll have the letter from school soon to tell us about the visits. Take care.

Love Deb

### *Summary*

- *The literature identifies the main areas of concern as the size and nature of the buildings, pupil teacher ratios (PTRs), the playground, assembly and lunch time.*

#### *My research found that:*

- *Parents' main concern was that their children's well-being and social confidence were addressed.*
- *Bullying, drugs, discipline, children losing their individuality, building style and security were additional areas of concern for parents.*
- *PTRs are mentioned as concerns in Chapters 4.1.2. and 4.2.*
- *Both the literature and my study found that children enjoyed playtime once they had formed friendships.*
- *Children, for the most part, enjoyed lunch time.*
- *Children were concerned, before starting, about not knowing others.*
- *Staff were aware of some of these concerns and have some strategies in place to help children overcome difficulties with lunch time and assembly. Both schools had systems in place for anti-bullying.*

## 4.4.

### INDUCTION TO SCHOOL

**“If you get it wrong at the beginning . . . .”  
(Parent at School B, July 1997)**

In this section I use the findings to tell the story of the initial stages of the induction to school. This is the time when children (and often their parents) are making short, ‘practice’ separations from home in the form of visits to school. It is the equivalent of van Gennep’s ‘liminal rites’ period where links are made with the next phase but where children occupy an ambiguous zone in which they begin to move from one group to another.

Some aspects from the literature are included about the following:

- 4.4.1. admission policies
- 4.4.1.1. summer born children
- 4.4.2 familiarisation with school
- 4.4.3 pre-entry profiles

I use letters, telephone conversations and e-mail between Debbie, at School A and Lorraine, at School B in order to illustrate ideas, wishes, beliefs, understandings and feelings of parents, particularly mothers about the above and then include a discussion about the findings.

#### **4.4.1. ADMISSION POLICIES**

“There is a sense of urgency about childhood - of hastening progress, of accelerating development. Is this born out of wanting the best for children or from some belief or value base which says the state of childhood is worth less than the state of adulthood and so we must do all we can to reach the day when childhood is over?”

(Nutbrown 1996, p.53)

Children in the United Kingdom start school earlier than their counterparts in the rest of Europe (Pugh 1996, p.9). The international norm is to start

between the ages of five and seven. In the UK children are legally required to start school in the term following their fifth birthday, one of the lowest ages for school admission in Europe. However, there is no clear educational rationale for this. Bennett and Kell (1989) cite the work of Stretzer (1964) who

“concluded that the age of admission was not based on any pedagogical or psychological principles but was “the accidental result of the exigencies of Parliamentary procedure and of general unconcern!”

(Bennett and Kell 1989, p.1)

A study by Cleave, Barker Lunn and Sharp in 1985 revealed that

“ . . . in recent years there has been a marked trend in England towards admitting more children under statutory school age to infant school. In particular, there is a growing tendency to admit them annually in the September of the school year in which they will become five, instead of by the more widespread practice of admitting them termly at five or rising-five.”

(Cleave, Barker Lunn and Sharp 1985, p.42)

In 1995, Sharp again reported on the policies adopted for admitting children and this time the

“ . . . results showed that annual entry was most common, followed by termly and biannual patterns. Just under a third of LEAs had changed their entry policy recently, all in favour of admitting younger fours.”

(Sharp 1995, p.1)

More children, who by virtue of their age are really eligible for nursery education, are now entering a system which was traditionally designed for children of five or above. Competition for pupils also influences this decision.



“The combined effects of LMS, parental choice and the Government’s desire to publish league tables of results, are all conspiring to make schools want to attract new pupils as early as possible.”

(Cleave and Brown 1993, p.23)

Even though the Nursery Education Voucher Scheme was withdrawn on 31 August 1997 it has had the effect of lowering the school starting age as

“Many local authorities, eager for the extra funding, opened up their primary schools to younger children, often extending the admission age downwards to take in toddlers as soon as they reached the age of four.”

(Whitehead 1998, p.2)

Annual admission is seen by many as being beneficial because it enables children to have three full years in infant school before assessment at seven (Cleave and Brown, 1993). However, four year olds who attend school have significantly less experience of life than classmates of statutory school age and may therefore be at a disadvantage. Dowling (1995) found no evidence to show that there is any educational or behavioural advantage linked to early school admission. Indeed, Hughes et al (1979 in Ghaye and Pascal 1988, p.4) found that those children having difficulties on entry were still having problems four terms later. A gardening analogy identifies the irrationality of this:

“Gardeners don’t plant runner beans in January to get an earlier harvest than their neighbours; if they tried, they would probably get shrivelled and stunted beans. They fertilise the ground in the early months of the year, so that when the beans are planted - at the right time - they will flourish.”

(Oxfordshire County Council, 1991 in Nutbrown 1996, p.53)

#### 4.4.1.1. SUMMER BORN CHILDREN

Sharp (1995) found that early entry to school for summer-born children did not result in higher achievement two or three years later. Pascal (1990) and Williams (1998) found that starting school at four is potentially extremely stressful, particularly where school policy, provision and practice did not take into account developmental needs of young children. Dahlberg and Asen (1994, p.163) suggest that “programmes relying on a more holistic and dynamic notion of childhood seem to be more successful” than acquiring academic skills.

“The child, the boy, the man, indeed, should know no other endeavour but to be at every stage of development wholly what this stage calls for. Then will each successive stage spring like a new shoot from a healthy bud; and, at each successive stage, he will with the same endeavour again accomplish the requirements of this stage: for only the adequate development of man at each preceding stage can effect and bring about adequate development at each succeeding later stage.”

(Froebel 1887, p.30, in Bruce et al 1995, p.16)

Nutbrown (1996) suggests that teachers need to make the most of the moment and respect the pace of childhood.

“ . . . for children it is *today* here, now, this minute that matters, but what we give them today must be made of the things *they need* today. . . . There is a mischievous mistruth in the belief that doing certain things early helps children to get ready for the next stage. The best way to help a child to get ready to be five is to let her be 3 when she is 3 and let him be 4 when he is 4 . . . .”

(Nutbrown 1996, p.54)

James and Prout (1990) underline this by stating that it is vital

“to focus on children not only as proto-adults, future-beings, but also on children as beings-in-the-present.”

(James and Prout 1990, p.232).

#### **4.4.2. FAMILIARISATION WITH SCHOOL**

Dowling (1995, p.23) states that the aim of familiarising children with school prior to entry is to ensure that the trauma of the start of school is minimised. In an attempt to do this she suggests that

“new parents and children need time and opportunities to become acquainted with the school accommodation and what happens inside it.”

(Dowling 1995, p.22)

However, it is unlikely that all children will respond to the new environment in the same way for there are few life transitions that make the same impact on everyone (Rutter and Rutter, 1992). Some children will have had a wide range of experiences prior to visiting school. Cleave and Brown (1991, p.20) suggest that the previous experiences that children bring with them need to be taken into account on any pre-entry visits and that for some children school may seem an ‘alien place’. In Barrett’s study it was found that

“Prior knowledge of the building, organisational patterns, people or activities gave both children and parents more confidence in that they were able to think about, anticipate, and therefore have some control over the new experience.”

(Barrett 1986, p.96)

There is substantial variability in people’s susceptibility to the effects of major social experiences (Rutter and Rutter, 1992) and therefore it may be the way in which children are introduced to their new environment which is significant. Bronfenbrenner (1979, p.211) states that

“the most critical direct link between two settings is the one that establishes the existence of a mesosystem in the first instance - the *setting transition* that occurs when a person enters a new environment.”

He suggests that the developmental potential of a setting is enhanced if the child's initial transition into that setting is in the company of one or more people from a previous setting. For example the child's mother serves as a source of security, provides a role model of social interaction and is of significance for the way in which the child is able to function in the new setting, if she accompanies the child on the first visit. The Reception class teacher is a key element in this dyad, especially if s/he converses with the mother. Dowling (1995, p.44) also identified the reception teacher as being important to the young child although Cleave and Brown (1991, p.197) found that

“LEA guidelines suggested that probationary teachers should not work with this age group. This was because ‘particular skills and experiences were required’ in what was described as a ‘very difficult job’.”

#### **4.4.3. PRE-ENTRY PROFILES**

When children start school they are at different developmental stages and their learning experiences vary widely. With the introduction of baseline assessment in September 1998 (QCA, 1998) all primary schools will have a statutory duty to assess children when they start school. However, if teachers have little in the way of information about the children before they begin, the start of school may be a time of discontinuity. If teachers know about children's previous experiences and their stage of development they

are more likely to achieve a better match of activities to learning ability and provide appropriate progression in learning (Emery 1993, p.8).

***E-mail correspondence between Debbie and Lorraine:***

From: <lorraine@BTinternet.com>  
To: <debbie@virgin.net>  
Subject: visit to school  
Date: February 1995

Dear Debbie

We're going up to school next week on the 14th with Stacey to visit the class that she's going to be in after Easter. She's going to go every Wednesday afternoon for the rest of term. She's really lucky because the children who started in September only had one visit before they started. Then they had an extra one to try out the lunch after some of the mums said something about it.

We know who her teacher's going to be. It's the lady whose daughter used to go to playgroup with Stacey. You know the one, I think you met her when we were at the shops just before Christmas. She lives just round the corner from school and seems to know all the children before they start.

Stephanie, down the road, has two teachers this term and it seems they're very different. Like chalk and cheese. Stephanie's mum said "they seem to complement each other - they're the ideal teachers". Anyway, it's one of them that's going to be Stacey's teacher.

I expect it's easier for you because you've already got James at school and you know most of the teachers, and now Hayley's starting!

It was nice to see you and . . .

Lorraine

From: debbie@virgin.net>  
To: <lorraine@btinternet.com>  
Subject: meeting the teacher  
Date: February 1995

Dear Lorraine,

I'm so pleased that you're going to meet Stacey's teacher. When James started we didn't know who his teacher was going to be until the very last visit! He'd been going for visits every Monday afternoon for six weeks and thought that the Headmistress was his teacher because she was the woman who was always there, and so nice to the children. It was such a shock when he found out that he was going to have someone else. Apparently several children thought the same thing! I think they could have done with the teacher coming in for half an hour so that we at least knew who she was. There was another mum who didn't get to meet the teacher until the first day of term because she'd missed the last visit. She'd found it very difficult because she'd had experience of a nursery school where the teacher appeared to have time to talk about worries. But at the school there never seems to be a time when you can get the teacher to yourself. If you have anything confidential to say there are people there all the time so you have to pick your moments to speak to them. There were things that she wanted the teacher to know about and didn't get a chance to tell her. Then something happened at school and her little girl felt guilty because the teacher didn't know about it. Had the teacher known, it wouldn't have happened.

I'm hoping it's going to be different with Hayley. We're going to go on Monday afternoon and meet the Headmistress. Just mums and dads for the first visit and then Hayley comes with us after that. The school could have included her on the letter rather than addressing it just to us.

I forgot to mention to you last week . . .

Debbie

From: <lorraine@btinternet.com>  
To: <debbie@virgin.net>  
Subject: first visit to school  
Date: March 1995

Dear Debbie,

We went to school, like I said, and I feel Stacey's going to be in good hands. All the other mums were there, and some dads, too. It was lovely to walk into the hall and the teacher seemed to know all the children, it made you feel confident. I didn't talk to the teacher, I didn't like to ask anything with everyone else there. Anyway, I felt that this first visit was about finding out about school, not the teacher. I wouldn't know what to ask until Stacey's been going a while. As long as I recognise the teacher on the first morning it'll be okay. I just need to know her face.

Must dash now, I'll phone soon and tell you all about the visit and I want to hear about how you got on at Hayley's school.

Lorraine

### ***Lorraine and Debbie talk on the phone:***

Hi Debbie, it's Lorraine. I thought I'd just phone and tell you about Stacey's visit to school and see how Hayley got on.

Oh, the children don't go the first time. All the parents went into the hall at 2 o'clock and that lovely secretary gave us a big envelope which had loads of forms to fill in. There was tea and biscuits and, oh yes, the sweatshirts were all laid out for us to buy.

Well, ours was very different. I think I told you in my e-mail, we took Stacey at One Thirty and the teacher was there to meet us in the hall with the Headteacher. He asked us all to sit down and then the children went with the teacher into the classroom. One wouldn't leave his mum and screamed and screamed. The head talked to us about PE kit, school uniform and lunch time. He wants us to come and help in the classroom.

Yes, we had some of that and about wanting us to help in school. First she told us about all these forms. The white card was for the school card index, the white forms for when Hayley goes on visits, the blue form was something to do with the government. Then there was the school prospectus . . .

Yes, we had one of those

. . . and the pre-school booklet, and she said that the pre-school profile was to come, and another booklet on the last visit!

Wow, what a lot of forms and things. The teacher came back and talked to us about what they wanted the children to be able to do. About writing their name and saying the letters and they gave us a sheet with letters and pictures on. She told us about a book that we could write in that is kept with their reading book and said it was so they could write messages to us, too. She told us about the reading scheme and showed us some books.

We're not going to get that until the last afternoon. That's when Hayley meets her teacher. The headmistress said she'll show us a video and tell us about how we can help with reading. This time she talked about us being partners and about the things in the prospectus. She talked very fast so I can't remember all of it now, but there was something about catching children doing well and she talked about all the subjects and fitting them together as themes and if something didn't fit, doing it separately.

Yes, we had something on maths, she showed us something she called multi-link and how they use things like that instead of copying out of books. Then somebody asked a question about medicines.

Oh, we had something about health and safety and about school meals and Friends of the School and how they've got a couple of parent reps for each class. I knew about that because Sheila did that when James first started. Then someone from the governing body talked to us and someone from the school health service had come along. She said they don't do head inspections any more.

Didn't they talk about the cuts?

No

You know I've been going to the meetings, don't you?

Mm

The budget still doesn't mean a lot to me. Anyway, the headteacher gave us an ear-bashing about the budget. So much so that we didn't have time to walk round the school like they usually do. I wanted to be shown round to see what they do. It would have given me a feel of the place. If you don't know anything about a school you go in like a piece of blotting paper. But I did get to see the children with the teacher. We all went down to the classroom to collect the children and they were having a story. But they're not going to be in that room, they're going to be in the room at the other end of the school. They were with all these other children today.

We haven't seen the classroom yet but we'll go to school every other Monday for the rest of this term and go into a room with some of the other children who are starting in the summer. It's not her



proper classroom. I have to stay with Hayley and do this pre-school profile like I did with James. It's a booklet with activities in it; colouring in and shapes. I thought school would want to know about the education he'd had so far but they gave us these booklets to do with him. I felt as if it was me that was being tested rather than them finding out about him.

Oh I'd like to be able to tell them what Stacey can do, although I suppose some parents might over exaggerate and then the teacher would expect that much more of them.

I think it's better that they start with a clean slate. Anyway with James they did puzzles and painting in the classroom and then the headmistress took the children into the hall for some games and a story. She took us round the school and showed us the toilets, and that nice secretary's room and the staff room. I would have liked a visit where I left Hayley so she could have a chance to be there without me and I'd have liked her to have had some contact with the teacher, but they still don't do that.

Look, I must go now and get tea ready. I'll see you next week.

Yeh, bye now, see you soon.

### ***E-mail correspondence:***

From: <lorraine@BTinternet.com>

To: <Debbie@virgin.net>

Subject: age of starting school

March 1995

Dear Debbie,

All the children are going into same age class this time. The classes in September had just a few children in them, then more came in January. I hadn't realised that they all started at different times but when you think about it they're all five at different times aren't they? Stacey's been ready to go for some time. They don't do much at playgroup and they don't have to finish anything if they don't want to, it's free and easy. I think playgroup helped prepare her for school and she's learnt social skills but school will be much more structured.

I saw Jenny the other day and . . .

Lorraine

**Lorraine writes to 'Granny':**

May 1995

Dear 'Granny'

It seems that Stacey's only got one term in this class, the ones who started in September have had three terms in school! I can't see how she's going to catch up with those children. They penalise the young ones who need to have the extra help. I'm so upset, I think it's cruel and unfair. Just because Stacey's born at a particular time of year, she misses out. I'm angry that she won't get a good deal. We'd have consciously planned her earlier if we'd known.

Stacey says you have to do work at school. She loves PE and apparatus and next week . . .

Lorraine

May 1995

Dear Lorraine,

*You mustn't get so angry. Ideally it would be nice if they could all start at the same time, although Stacey would only have been just four last September. I'm relieved that she's going into a Reception class with children her own age. I'd be very unhappy if she went into a class with older ones. It's very much a bonus that she'll be with her friends.*

*What concerns me more is if she has to move at the end of this term. I'd like her to stay in that class because they don't have long in reception and she'd have another new start so shortly after starting school if she moved class in September. You must find out what happens next term. Will she be with her friends again then or will she move to a class with different children? Perhaps she'll meet up with her friends from playgroup who started before her.*

*Now, what did you think about . . .*

Mum

## ***DISCUSSION***

### **Admission**

The two schools in my research both had three intakes per year which was outlined in their School Prospectuses as required by the 1988 Education Reform Act. Children started school in the term before their fifth birthday and visited school the previous term. There was a desire among parents to “get them in and get them on”. Forty nine of the fifty parents wanted their child to start school when they did (the term before their fifth birthday) or before, and felt that their child was “ready” and had “outgrown” the nursery and play group settings. Indeed, there were comments such as “any later would have been too late”. Only one parent had considered keeping her daughter at a nursery for another term and “holding her back” because she was “very happy at the nursery and there was a higher ratio of staff, more nurturing”. However, she decided to send her child to school as “she had to go through it whichever stage she was at, but she was the youngest in the class.” Admitting children to school early was justified by parents as children being better off with an early start to school. However, they may not have realised that schools have different PTRs from nursery.

Forty five percent of parents did not know the official starting age of compulsory education. All the parents thought that the benefits of starting school a term earlier than statutory school age had outweighed those of having their child at home or at nursery or playgroup for longer. Parents felt that “he would have missed a lot and been behind” or “he wouldn’t

have had the opportunities that he's had" if they waited until the age of compulsory education. This earlier start to school might give children longer in school but the implications of this are greater PTRs than those experienced in the pre-school settings.

All except two of the seventeen parents of summer born children indicated some concern about their child's ability to achieve at a similar level to their older peers within the same year group. They were pleased that their child was starting school in a reception class with children of a similar age. Parents of those summer born children who were staying with the same teacher the following term when they moved to Y1 were pleased that their children were having continuity of staff and friends. This culture that values and enables children to develop at a gradual pace is likely to help children to become part of a larger group and develop confidence.

#### Familiarisation with School

Parents welcomed the pre-school visits but were not always satisfied with their structure and quantity. Getting the content right is important. Too much information for parents was overwhelming, could not be absorbed and was, therefore, unhelpful. The timing is also important. Most parents wanted more visits for their children but nearer to the time of starting school. One parent pointed out that the school holiday before starting school makes it drawn out because "you can anticipate for too long; it becomes nerve wracking".

When the visits took place in a different room from the one in which the children would be starting, some children became confused at the start of the school term. They still had to become familiar with the lay-out of the room and the rest of the building in relation to their classroom.

The amount of time spent at school during the pre-start visits did not necessarily give children a picture of school in terms of length of a school day. Neither was the content of the visits similar to a school day, which might create misunderstandings about school and lead to over expectations about the curriculum on offer.

Staff saw the visits as giving children an introduction to the routine of school life, an enjoyable “taste of school” and an opportunity to be separated from their parents. They were also to help parents get a feel for the geography of the building, “establish what we’re about” and an opportunity for parents to raise questions. Staff wanted to get to know the children and give them an opportunity to get to know one another. These aims, however, were not always achieved. For those children who visited an established class, the room was crowded and “the older ones felt put out by these younger ones impinging on their territory” (Teacher at School B). Therefore, it was not only disrupting for those who were just beginning to settle into school but the visiting children were possibly confused by the amount of children and the teacher was having to consider a wide range of developmental needs.

The nature of the first meeting with the teacher is important. Children were separated abruptly from their parents at School B on the first visit and one child refused to leave his mother. At School A, children were confused when they met their teacher as they thought the headteacher was their teacher.

Parents were pleased to know whose class their child would be in before the start of school. Two parents at School A said that they would have liked to have chosen whose class their child went into because it was important to get the first teacher/child relationship right. Others were relieved when their child “got who she wanted”. 37% thought that the first teacher was significant because “they’ll try their best for that teacher” and “it’s make or break” and “it could have been a disaster if it was the wrong teacher”. Personality and experience of the Reception class teacher were seen as important factors. One parent felt that the inexperience of her child’s teacher caused her son’s work to “go down hill. The best wasn’t pulled out of him” during his first year at school.

40% of parents knew the reception class teacher(s) before their child started school, due to having had a child at school before, or knowing her because she lived in the locality. They were able to use this information to give their child some indication of her personality before the start of school. Children were looking forward to meeting their teacher with comments such as “the teacher’s going to be nice and not shout”. Several of the

children at School B had met their teacher informally as she lived near the school. This might indicate that children and parents want to meet and get to know the teacher at an early stage.

For children and their parents to become familiar and feel reasonably secure with the people, the layout of the classroom and access to and from classroom and toilets may take several visits. Children may need to be given time to observe where materials are kept and take part gradually in routines without feeling pressured. This is likely to build confidence and enable children to take part more fully in school.

#### Pre-entry Profiles

No records were passed to the schools from the pre-school settings although records were given to parents in some instances. School A had pre-entry profiles and School B introduced them in 1996. 76% of parents were expecting to complete some form of pre-entry profile and thought that it might be useful as they might find out their child's capabilities. This has implications for the content of the profile if it is to solve such queries. Some parents felt that there was a definite need for the school and parents to work together in partnership on the profiles. However, some were unsure as to their benefit and a sizeable minority thought that such profiles were a measurement of the quality of their parenting. Some teachers scrutinised them after children had begun school but took much of it "with a pinch of salt".

### *Summary*

*My research indicated that:*

#### *Admission:*

- *Not all parents of summer born children realised their child only had one term in reception class. They were more concerned about continuity of teacher and friendships.*
- *The three term entry caused disturbance to those children already at school if the new entrants visited the classroom with the previous term's intake in situ.*

#### *Familiarisation with school:*

- *Parents viewed visits to school prior to starting as advantageous.*
- *Parents wanted information, but too much information on the first visit caused confusion and got in the way.*
- *Parents appreciated a tour of the school if it was offered.*
- *Parents wanted the opportunity to leave their children at school to give them a feeling of the length of a school day and get them used to not having their parents there.*
- *Visits might make children think that school is part time.*
- *Parents wanted to meet the teacher as soon as possible to prepare their child. Finding out on the last visit was less than satisfactory.*

#### *Pre-entry profiles:*

- *Parents expected to complete a pre-entry information form but were unsure what it might contain.*
- *Some parents felt that it was they who were being assessed.*



## 4.5.

### CHILDREN'S INCORPORATION INTO SCHOOL

**"I'm going to big school soon"  
(Child at School A, May 1994)**

In this chapter I use my research data to tell the story of starting school and the incorporation into school from the child's point of view. This is van Gennep's (1960) third stage of 'postliminal rites' during which children are adjusting to school, conferring new identities and roles and acquiring the new culture.

Many of the children in my research had older brothers and sisters. Several times parents and children mentioned how helpful the older siblings had been in "making the moves for them" and being a positive role model for the younger one. Children mentioned that their older brother or sister had "told me about school". After the initial interviews I narrowed my sample to half (twelve in each school) and, within that, deliberately included half of those children from each intake who have older siblings.

Each time I talked with parents and children they reflected on the start of school. I shall use this data, along with the data as children actually went through the process, to tell the tale of 'James' and his incorporation into school. This will include aspects on:

- making sense of the school culture and learning about the language, systems and routines of school;
- making friends and becoming part of a class;
- children's views on parent/teacher partnerships (also see Chapter 4.6.);
- parents' notions of their child settling in (introduced in Chapter 4.2.);
- parents' thoughts on their child's change of behaviour during the first few weeks at school.

Some of the findings from this chapter may eventually be incorporated into a children's book. There are several children's books (Ahlberg and Ahlberg, 1988; Hughes, 1973; Sumiko, 1983) which explore what children may expect in the way of activities and routine at school but few (Anholt, 1997; Bradman, 1998) about children's feelings at the start of school, other than through the illustrations.

This chapter takes the form of a conversation between 'Hayley', her brother 'James' and their 'father' about their feelings and perceptions about the start and incorporation to school. A telephone call between 'Debbie'

and 'Lorraine' discusses aspects of settling in and changes of behaviour. The relevant literature and discussion follows the story. 'Debbie' sets the scene . . .

From: <debbie@virgin.net>  
To: <lorraine@btinternet.com>  
Subject: starting school  
Date: March 1995

Dear Lorraine,

The other day when Hayley was playing schools with her dolls, John and the children were talking about school. Hayley drew a picture of how she imagines her teacher to be and, not to be outdone, James drew two: One of when he started school and the other as he is now, looking very grown up near the end of the infants. I've put them on the fridge door so you'll be able to see them next time you come round. Anyway, the conversation went along these lines . . .

Dad: Are you looking forward to going to school, Hayley?

Hayley: Ooh! Yes!

Dad: Do you know what happens there?

Hayley: I don't know. Mm, it's like pre-school.

James: No it's not, you only play at playgroup and you don't do any work. We get loads of work to do at school. We go all day. Playgroup is for little children. School's bigger and there's more things to play with. School's got drawers and water and playgroup hasn't. And it's the same 'cos we've got a home corner and they've got a home corner. You'll learn about reading and writing and PE and . . .

Hayley: What 's PE?

James: It's when you take your clothes off and climb and things.

Hayley: Is that what the ladders in the hall are for? I thought they were for the builders when the school's old, to mend it.

Dad: Do you remember when you first started school James?

James: When we started it was a different class, I didn't have my uniform on and . . .

Dad: I think that was on the visits.

James: Yes, and on the first day we got up very early so we wouldn't miss anything and I was happy but a bit scared of going in and the . . .

Hayley: And I went with you.

James: And I kissed you and mum goodbye at the door.

Dad: What are you drawing there, Hayley?

Hayley: I'm drawing a picture of my teacher. I'm going to give it to her when I go.

James: I'm going to draw, too. I'm going to draw a picture of me when I first started and one of me now.

Dad: What do you think a teacher does, Hayley?

Hayley: She tells you what to do and learns you stuff. She'll learn me how to write and how to read. You've got to do your homework everyday. There'll be pencils and paper and she talks about the letters on the wall. Will there be books there?

Dad: Yes, lots of books, like the ones that James brings home.

James: My first reading book didn't have any words in it! I thought I'd just be playing with things when I first went. My first work was a little bit of writing but I couldn't write much letters down, and talking to Mrs Brown. I was really happy that I was in school. When we started with the Clixo it was hard and on the computer I thought I had to put it on and it would do it by itself, but it didn't! But the big ones told me. Now I'm six I know how to do things. It was fun. It's still fun! In Reception we did painting and drawing and sand, I really wanted to find sand there, and home corner and we do lots of writing and we sit down for the register. You go to learn things. You've got to learn haven't you?

Dad: Yes, but how did you learn where all the things were kept and what to do?

James: Miss Brown told us in showing time and I looked round. She told us you're not allowed to make so much noise and not to go to the toilet without asking and playing nicely and when you play in the sand there's only three meant to be in there and not to do naughty things, don't throw

sand or shout. And you put your picture in the yellow book and you have to see if you can write it yourself, you can't scribble. If you ask you can go in the playdough but you have to see if there's too much people there. I watched and then I knowed everything.

Hayley: Emma says if you're naughty you get told off and put on the naughty chair.

Dad: I don't think there's a naughty chair but I don't expect it's very nice being told off.

James: No! It feels like something wrong with yourself.

Dad: Hayley's not going to be naughty, are you? Tell us about the work, James.

James: The teacher tells us before we do our work. You have to do what you've been told. Sometimes the older ones show me and sometimes I think it out by myself. If you don't know how to do it you tell the teacher and she'll say it or you wait till she comes round. Sometimes I ask Richard or close my eyes and think really hard.

Dad: Aren't there any other grown ups around? Richard's mum goes in to help.

James: There's the other teachers and the headmistress, she looks after the school. The helpers hear you read and help the teachers. They make words and help you do your work. Sometimes, when the new ones come, they have to help them and show them what to do.

Daddy, you know you always want to know what I've done at school, why don't you come into school and see my work? Then you can see how good I've got on and see what I've been up to and know everything that I can do.

Dad: Your mum goes in. I'll get your report next term. Is Richard coming round today?

James: In the report they say if I'm good or not good.

Hayley: Me and Emma are going to visit school again next week.

Dad: Have you made any new friends yet?

Hayley: Yep. When I saw Gail I thought, I know her, and she came up and said hello and that made me feel okay.

James: It was difficult to get to know people when I first went to school. It was scary 'cos I didn't know anyone there. Paul from playgroup had gone into another class. The first friend I made was Richard, we played the space game in the playground, and then I played with William and got to know the other new children. Richard lets me have his toys and helps me and I helped him go down the slide. If you don't share you won't have any friends.

Look! I've finished my picture. I was little then, now I'm taller. I'm much happier now. When I first went I was terrified of not having any friends, now I'm not because I've got new friends, I know everyone now. When I started I was quiet but now I like to talk a lot and the work has got harder. I can ride without stabilisers now. I'm big now.

Hayley: I'll be big when I go to big school.

James: No you won't: You'll be one of the little ones!

James is just so grown up now!  
Love Deb

(See Appendix 11 for children's drawings)

Hi Debbie, Lorraine.

Hello

I thought I'd just give you a quick ring to thank you for the e-mail about James starting school. I don't think Stacey's worried about making friends as her group are all starting together, although one of them's going to the other school and Stephanie started after Christmas. She's still enjoying the visits and looking forward to starting full time.

Yes, Hayley is, too. I hope next term they both settle in as well as James did. He was very excited about going and we had no trouble. We were amazed, not a tear or anything, he was quite happy to go. I thought he might decide not to go the next day and say 'I don't want to go' but he was fine, I was really pleased. I think once he'd got a few more friends and discovered PE he was happier and now he loves it, absolutely loves it.

I expect he felt safe.

I could tell he was okay because he was happy to leave me, never any crying. Not like Richard. His mum thought he'd settled in well at the beginning and then about three weeks in he didn't want to go to school. In fact, it took him until half way into the second term before

he really settled. He was certainly stressed by school and had quite a few wet beds, and sometimes had nightmares.

Oh dear

He calmed down after half a term. She thinks it was accumulated tiredness but I'm not sure, it still took him a while to settle after that. James found it a bit unsettling, too, after Christmas when another group of children started. I wasn't happy with so many children in the class. It was difficult for the teacher in January because she needed time with the new ones. James lost out because she was busy with them.

Yes, I suppose the visits must disrupt things, too. I know Stephanie said she didn't like the class changing. But Stacey thinks with these visits that she's already started school.

Well, if they help to prepare her that's okay. They helped James to settle. He would never have joined in if he hadn't been there before. He'd had time to think about it and adjust. It particularly helped on the first day because he knew the school and knew what it was about from day one.

Yes, I suppose it helps them to get used to faces and where things are, where the toilets are and where to eat lunch. Like a half-way house between playschool and school. Anyway, Stacey knows that school's a nice place to go now and she thinks she's very grown up.

James matured rapidly in those first few weeks of school and became more confident and independent. He was also extremely tired and irritable and very hungry. When he was let out of school he came out on a high and charged around, and answered back! Really difficult to control.

I hope Stacey's not like that!

It affects them in different ways. It's not tired him out like people said it would. He comes in, fights like cat and dog with Hayley to re-establish his rights, and then wants to play. He's not bothered with television so much now, whereas his friend Richard seems better behaved since he's gone to school. He used to be one for playing out on his bike but now he comes in and crashes out in front of the television for an hour and then wants to play quietly on his own.

Yes, we have a bit of that now, an adjustment period when she comes home. It's the going in and coming out that's difficult but I hadn't realised that it was going to be like this. Anyway, must dash now. I'll e-mail you before Easter. I want to ask you about those things that James

was talking about. About what goes on in school and how to help Stacey before she starts. Take care, bye.

Bye.

#### **4.5.1. MAKING SENSE OF SCHOOL**

Ghaye and Pascal (1988, p.17) challenge the notion that the child simply adjusts to school and state that

“The child-school incorporation process is a dynamic, multifaceted, interactive process between all the participants involved.”

This section explores some of those incorporation processes.

##### **4.5.1.1. CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE**

Children need time to ‘build a picture’ of school and understand the meaning of school when they first begin. They are entering an institutional setting where expectations of behaviour and daily routines probably differ considerably from anything that they have encountered before and where their mother is replaced temporarily by a ‘corporate person’ in the form of the teacher (Burtscher, 1997).

Cleave and Brown (1991, p.17) suggest that

“arrangements made for their arrival and early days in school should be gradual processes that respond flexibly to individual needs and take children’s pre-school experiences into account”

Dowling (1988, p.84), too, suggests that the emphasis is not only on practitioners to consider how 'new' children can be helped to adjust to school but also to consider "the respective roles that teacher and parent will play in the process". If teachers become attuned to children's understanding and come to "know each other's minds" (Bruner 1996a, p.12) and attempt to make sense of what children know it is likely that that this will help the child to become incorporated into the class. If this is the case, then teachers would benefit from gaining background knowledge from parents about the children as well as setting their own agenda for children's entry to school, for children bring their own culture to school.

#### 4.5.1.2. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Cleave et al (1982, p.114) highlight children's bewilderment at the amount of unfamiliar words and phrases during the first days of school. Gura (1996) proposes that making sense of the conventions of social interactions at school is a major task for children. Newcomers have to learn when they may talk to one another and when this is not allowed (Willes 1983, p.68). Learning the systems for answering in a group such as "bidding" (Willes 1983, p.71) is also learned. Understanding the language of instruction and communication at school is certainly important if children are to learn.

Curtis (1986, p.154) outlines that, at home, children learn from an early age to interpret not only verbal communications but also non-verbal gestures and mannerisms which are characteristic of their own environment and



culture. According to Trevarthen (1996) children form idiosyncratic communications, learning through mimesis of the mother's voice, facial expression and hands. Non-verbal cues at school, however, may be vastly different and need to be interpreted. The language of school may also cause difficulties, resulting in children not being able to understand all the meanings of a word or sentence that are used in instructions and information (Curtis 1986, p.155). This suggests that teachers' awareness of their own cultural interpretations and ways of speech may help them respond to the differences in children's understanding. Edwards and Knight (1994), too, identify that on entry to school children are usually operating effectively in their own home and that one of the difficulties that practitioners have to manage is the need to

“maintain children's sense of personal effectiveness while they are learning to operate in a context in which the social rules and amount of adult attention will be very different”  
(Edwards and Knight 1994, p.14).

#### 4.5.1.3. RULES AND ROUTINES

The cultural system of a classroom affects those who operate within it but routines serve adult purposes for maintaining the social order of the class and are not experienced by children as any immediate concern of theirs (Willes 1983, p.70). However, children come to accept and take them for granted within a short time of starting school. Indeed, Sherman (1996, p.11) found that children were so accepting of the routine they followed that they would not consider an alternative for “the *routine* was *school*”.

Children come to school with attitudes, expectations and value systems which are characteristic of their own family structures (Curtis 1986, p.155). Those with older siblings may have acquired some of the expected school values and mores through using “script knowledge” (Gura 1996, p.37) from role play about school where they have explored make-believe school with others who have experience of ‘real’ school. For some children, however, the values and customs of the classroom may be different from those encountered at home or from any role play situation. This mismatch may produce conflict and uncertainty within the child. Curtis (1986) points out, however, that children soon learn the difference between those behaviours which are acceptable at home and those expected within the classroom setting. Although Sherman (1996) proposes that children construct their own, often distorted, interpretation of their teacher’s words about behaviour.

Willes’ (1983) observations led her to note that reception class teachers were

“engaging children in the rules, rituals and opportunities of the classroom by interacting with them as if the children were already aware of the complexity of those rules and rituals”.

(Edwards and Knight 1994, p.14)

Edwards and Knight (1994) compare this ‘as if’ behaviour to that of parents ‘inducting’ very young babies into the family. This behaviour decreases over the first year as the child becomes able to act and communicate for him or herself. The difference at school is that the teacher

groups the children in his/her care rather than relating on a one-to-one basis. Teachers can thus be seen as mediators who facilitate the child's entry into a new world. Indeed, Willes (1983) argues that adult approval is one of the key factors in successful initiation into becoming a pupil.

#### **4.5.2. EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING**

Even the most confident children can find the move to school intimidating, not feel in control and fear being wrong (Dowling 1995, p.40). Children need to feel secure and emotionally ready for school in order to meet new challenges with confidence (Goleman 1996, p.194). If children cannot cope with the change of circumstances then they are unlikely to engage fully in the life of the class, may under-perform academically and perhaps express frustration by demonstrating poor behaviour. Although some children adjust quickly to school, others are passive recipients of their strange new culture (Dowling 1995, p.41).

Parents have a powerful effect on their child's sense of self-worth. When children start school it is the reception class teacher who will also influence that sense of identity. Positive self-esteem, with its resulting confidence and emotional well-being, depends upon whether children feel that others accept them as competent and worthwhile (Nutbrown 1996, p.24).

Self-esteem, will affect the way in which children perceive their level of success (Ball, 1994). Black (1998) observed that children's perceptions were that

“summative assessments of them were for the school's and their parents' benefit, not for themselves”

(Black 1998, p.129)

Research has shown the correlation between high self-esteem and high academic achievement (Nutbrown, 1996). However, to notice and value children fully puts a heavy responsibility on the reception class teacher in a large class where there are few adults (Klein, 1993). If there is a lack of well-being the chances are that the child's development may be threatened (Vandenbussche, 1994).

Hughes et al (1979) in their research into the process of adjustment to school found that 13% of children were found to be having difficulties coping with school after half a term and suggest that “some kind of emotional disturbance” was involved, although for the majority the difficulties of starting were relatively short lived. However, they found that the January intake had more difficulties than the September intake because they are generally part of a small group joining an already established class.

#### **4.5.3. SOCIAL WELL-BEING**

Harmonious adaptation results from the child's ability to satisfy his or her own needs within the environment (Kienig, 1997). One of these is the child's ability to establish social relations with other children and adults. However, differences in social skills may lead to differences in participation

and opportunities to be actively involved. If children are socially skilled they are more likely to have a succession of positive experiences with other children (Goleman 1996, p.223) which, in turn, might bring a sense of well-being. Rutter (1997) suggests that it is the quality of the parents' relationship which may influence the child's level of success in relationships with others.

Winterhoff (1997) highlights the way in which teachers assign children to work together in an attempt to develop friendships. However, although this comes about for some children, for others they ostensibly develop friendships but in reality this is not the case, therefore suggesting that this strategy does not always contribute to the formation of friendships.

Children define themselves in relation to the people with whom they are involved (Gura, 1996). Thus, younger children grow up and form their identities in the wake of their older siblings. Pollard states, that their social development should, therefore,

“be seen as being symbiotic rather than just sequential, for each provides a vital element of the social context for the other”

(Pollard, 1996 p.269)

Gura (1996) suggests that there is a constantly shifting nature in children's relationships where opposing categories are common such as big and small; younger and older and where

“sometimes they are in a subordinate role, at other times they are superior or see themselves as equals.”

(Gura 1996, p.36)

## ***DISCUSSION***

### **Making Sense of School**

There was some confusion among some children in my study about when they had begun school because they thought that the pre-entry visits were the official start of school. This might have had something to do with the phrase ‘we’re going to school today’ which parents used during the time of the pre-entry visits.

Some children were not sure what to expect at school even after parents and pre-school staff had talked to them and they had experienced the pre-entry visits. Children made comparisons between pre-school and school equipment, the curriculum and their own increasing size to help with their understanding of school. Those with older siblings were more informed. Some children did not know about PE before they started school and questioned me about the pictures of children changing for, and engaging in, PE in the photograph album that I used during the first interviews (see Appendix 4).

Teachers said that children learn about school by “picking it up from the existing children” and that they deliberately partner new children with established members of the class in those classes where there are older children. However, if established children are initiating the younger ones into the culture of classroom this might mean that the culture of the new

children is not taken into account. Teachers helped the children to make sense of school by giving children time, by telling the children “this is how we do things in school”, by explaining what is going to happen and by drawing attention to expected behaviour by saying “look at so and so she’s . . . .”. Children said they learned about school through listening to the teacher, asking their friends and watching others. However, children may misinterpret what they see and confusion may result as a consequence. This occurred in one school where a myth had developed about a ‘naughty chair’ where miscreants were sat.

#### Social and Emotional Well-being

Parents were surprised when their child’s behaviour changed once they had begun school. For most children there was also a daily transition in psychological and physical adjustments that they made at the end of the school day when they went home. Many children who had started school in September were discontented when a new group of children joined their class in January.

Those children who started school with a friend were happier than those who were separated from their friends or who did not have a close friend. Playtime was an important time to negotiate, form and maintain friendships. However,

“beneath the benign appearances of children’s friendships lies a conceit. The path of friendship is wrought with ‘betrayals’, ‘sudden fickleness’, and failed ‘wooings’”  
(Deegan 1996, p.6)

Children sometimes had to re-negotiate friendships and the playground was the place where this social process took place. Once children had made friends their confidence and associated well-being increased. Teachers thought that children had adapted to school when “they’re happy to leave mum” and “when they’ve started to make friends”.

Children experienced some confusion about their self-perception during the induction to school. Their pre-school setting and their parents told them that they were ‘big’ before they start but, once at school, they became ‘the little ones’. This is addressed further in Chapter 4.7.

Many children experienced pressure from home to work hard, behave and “listen to teacher”. Parents’ evenings were viewed by children as their parents’ on a finding out exercise about their achievements and for the benefit of parents and teacher rather than a working together to help the child’s learning. For some children it was a source of pressure that made them anxious, for others it was a source of pride. Children perceived their parents’ desire to enter school at other times as a time to inform their teacher of a medical need, for example a visit to the dentist or doctor, rather than seeing the teacher about their learning.

By the end of Y2 all children thought that they had changed since starting school in their physical appearance and also in their state of well-being. This latter was due to the fact that they had made close friends and knew



the names of others in the class. Their nervous feelings at the start of school which might have been to do with the unknown in terms of the environment, routines and people, had disappeared and they were happy to face the transition to KS2 knowing they were in the company of friends.

### *Summary*

#### *Cultural knowledge:*

- *Children were not sure what to expect of school.*
- *Older siblings help in the information process.*
- *Children learned the systems and culture by listening to the teacher's directions, through observing and asking friends.*
- *Older children in the class help to initiate younger ones into the expected culture.*

#### *Emotional well-being:*

- *Parents thought that the pre-entry visits helped their child adjust to school. Some children were happy to attend school from the start, others became unsettled after a few weeks or the following term, while for some it took a term or more before they displayed signs of well-being.*
- *The January intake had an unsettling effect.*
- *Indicators of children having settled were to do with friendships that developed before or during pre-entry visits or at the start of school, and having a mental set that school is a good place to be.*
- *Children undergo a daily transition to and from school in which they make psychological and physical adjustments.*

#### *Social well-being:*

- *Children worried about not knowing anyone and not having friends at the start of school.*
- *Those who started with a group of friends were less tense and settled more quickly.*
- *Parents' choice of school divided some friendship groups. Starting school at different times of the year divided some friendships groups.*
- *Children enjoyed playtime and were able to develop friendships during this time.*
- *Friendships played a large part in children's well-being.*

## 4.6.

### PARENTS' INCORPORATION: DEVELOPING A PARTNERSHIP

**"I can't imagine what they do all day at school."  
(Parent)**

When children begin school it is not only they who are embarking on a journey through school but their parents are too. This chapter takes the data and, with our 'composite people', explores perceptions of the development of the parent-teacher partnership from before the start of school to the end of KS1. This includes parents' knowledge about school in general terms of how the school operates and in areas specific to their child, as well as the 'transitions' that parents make as they get to know each new teacher. This chapter looks at:

- Parental Involvement;
- Support for learning; and
- Feedback to parents.

As we saw in Chapter 4.2 (Preparing for School) parents have high expectations of the partnership with school before their child begins, although they do not always know what form it will take or who manages it. They want to help their child before he or she starts school but often feel ill-equipped to provide well informed support for their child and want the school to direct them in this several months before their child begins. The notion of partnership through home visiting was also developed in Chapter 4.2. where it was found that parents in my study had mixed views on the benefit of these and, on the whole, thought that teachers' time was better spent elsewhere.

This chapter follows our two 'mums' from the induction visits to the end of KS1. Each section begins with some relevant literature, followed by correspondence between Lorraine and Debbie and then a discussion.

**4.6.1. PRE-ENTRY: THE PARTNERSHIP BEGINS**

Children begin school with a variety of experiences and different levels of intellectual development and social competence. These differences

“reinforce the importance of close co-operation with parents in making the transition from home to school and helping the children to cope with the demands of a busy school day” (NCC 1989, p.18).

Robson (1996, p.73) suggests that within the home-school partnership there are uni-directional relationships involving information, contact and involvement, and reciprocal ones which include collaboration and partnership. She states that induction to school is

“not a one-way process, in which the child, and his or her family, adjust to school” (Robson 1996, p.66)

but that there should be opportunities for each to have some impact upon the other. Pugh and De’Ath (1989, p.34) suggest a framework of involvement from non-participation, support, participation, partnership to control. Neither are suggesting that there is a linear progression along a continuum nor that it can be assumed that all parents want a close partnership, as the amount of involvement will vary according to circumstances.

If the roles are to be complementary, as Bruce (1997, p.152) suggests, then the partnership may begin with the partners listening to one another and taking ownership and responsibility for shared aims. Effectiveness of continuity is most likely to be determined by the quality of partnership (DES, 1990) and as Bastiani (1995) states

“parents and teachers are both educational influences, each with their own special contributions to make.”

(Bastiani 1995, p.7)

However, this may not necessarily be in equal parts as there will be an element of give and take by all concerned. This suggests that, not only might parents share their child’s previous learning with teachers and the preparation that has gone on long before with regard to learning as outlined by Barrett (1986, p.16), but teachers, too, might help parents by giving them knowledge about the ways in which children learn and the ways in which they support them in this learning. In this way parents may be able to make an informed contribution to their child’s development.

The potential of this partnership and children’s learning may be increased when educators see the home as a context for learning (DES, 1990) for

“the education system can only become learner centred by fully recognising that the home is the most significant place of learning in peoples’ lives.”

(Alexander 1996, p.17)

This suggests that more attention might be given to bringing experiences from home into school and perhaps “using the school as a resource centre for supporting the home as a place of learning” (Alexander 1996, p.17).

***Lorraine reflects on the way she has helped Stacey:***

From: <Lorraine@btinternet.com>

To: <Debbie@virgin.net>

Subject: Learning at home

Date: March 1995

Dear Debbie,

The tour of the school gave me a feel of the place but not about the daily activities. I'd like to have seen what goes on in a class or it

would've been nice to have seen a video of a day. What I'd like to know is how Stacey compares to the norm.

I've steered clear of doing too much with her before she starts in case she has to re-do it. I think I've been teaching her the alphabet and reading the wrong way. I want to get it right but I feel as if I'm working in the dark. I would've liked to have been given some guidelines so I'm not clashing with the school.

I don't know what they'll suggest once she starts. I expect I'll have to practice words and reading with her and writing exercises, but nothing major because she'll be too tired at the end of the day. If I know what they're doing I can do things at home. Perhaps they'll put up a notice telling us what topic they're doing, but really what I'll want to know is how she's getting on and the things she needs pulling up on.

What I really want is to be kept informed and told the truth. And I'll want to know how she's behaving. It'll be good for Stacey if she knows that I'm in contact with the school.

It's difficult because someone else is taking her over. She'll suddenly have someone else and she might not want to tell me anything any more. I think I'll try and get involved and join the PTA and go on trips and things so I'll know what's going on.

I'm sorry to trouble you with all my worries. I expect you went through all this with James so it won't be so bad this time . . .

Lorraine

## **DISCUSSION**

Before children started school many parents felt inadequate in their ability to prepare their children for learning at school. They wanted support and instruction from school on the way in which they might link the two microsystems to establish a mesosystem which built and ensured continuity of learning. This lack of knowledge at pre-entry contrasted with information overload during induction.

Parents were enthusiastic about their child starting school and the potential partnership that they envisaged. No-one explicitly told parents what partnership might look like although at the induction talk the headteacher at School A said

“you have a role to play in your child’s education. You’re a partner and we encourage you to take part.”

At School B nothing was mentioned about partnership, indeed parents were told

“we encourage them to be as independent as possible. Bring them into the classroom on the first day but we have a ‘no toys’ rule and try to leave them at the door after a few weeks”

Parents were expecting the school to suggest homework in the form of reading and writing exercises and wanted to have honest evaluations of their child’s progress. The schools did not, however, take advantage of this enthusiasm from parents before the children started school to create a two-way process. If parents want to be involved but are not sure how, schools may have a role to play in helping parents by taking shared responsibility at an earlier stage.

#### **4.6.2. THE RECEPTION CLASS**

Once children have begun school, parents may want to gain information about their child, have sufficient access to school and be given a wide variety of opportunities to understand their child’s work and progress. Vopat (1994, p.8), however, suggests that many parents feel disaffected from school, many are unsure how they can best help their child succeed,

and many have no support and encouragement for their own accomplishments as parents.

“In order for parents to support the school and to recognise their central educational role, they need to gain a detailed picture of school life, understand just how best they can help their child at home and how they can work in close liaison with the teacher.”

(Dowling 1995, p.23)

Tizard and Hughes (1984) and Bastiani (1995) found that parents are interested in their own children's education and view part of their role as parents as giving support to learning at home. Indeed, Wells (1986) and Tizard and Hughes (1984) have demonstrated how families provide a rich learning environment for their children.

Hughes et al (1994) found that many parents felt that they did not know enough about what went on at school in a general sense and would like to know more. They discuss the “large and varied amount of contact between parents and schools” (Hughes et al 1994, p.169) in which parents gather information from and about the school, frequently relying on their children as the main source of information. However, they found that there was still a paucity of knowledge about what was happening in their children's schools. This implies that the contact may be of a limited nature or there is diffidence on the part of parents about asking teachers, however friendly and welcoming the staff. Teachers may only see the parent as a “vehicle for the child and on maintaining the institutional routine” (Alexander 1996,

p.17). A shared understanding between parents and teachers may help children receive the same messages from each (Cousins 1990, p.28).

***Debbie and Lorraine exchange perceptions:***

From: <Debbie@Virgin.net>  
To: <Lorraine@BTInternet.com>  
Subject: Communication  
Date: April 1995

Dear Lorraine,

We had all that talking during the induction days which was far too much. I didn't understand a lot of it and now I've forgotten most of it anyway. We weren't able to meet the teacher so we don't know what she expected. People assume you know just because you've had one start at school but it's different each time. It was quite hard at the beginning finding out who was who. It would have been nice to have had a list and some photos of the staff. And, we needed to be told that she would be bringing verbal messages home. They relied on the children to relay information so we didn't know about the school photo.

I feel like once I've taken her to the doorway she's Mrs Brown's. I would've liked to have gone and looked but I've not felt that I've had permission to do so. I don't like to intrude.

I'd like to go in and help but I haven't got time because I'm going to go and do a course so I can get back to work. Richard's mum was keen to get in there. He loves it that his mum helps and she learns what's happening but she does wonder if they're just paying lip-service to helpers. She says it's not organised very well.  
Love Debbie

From: <Lorraine@BTInternet.com>  
To: <Debbie@Virgin.Net>  
Subject: Support with Learning  
Date: April 1995

Dear Debbie,

Stacey doesn't tell me much about school. The first week I hadn't got a clue. I had to learn the right words like number and English. I try to prise it out of her but I'm better not asking. It's as if it's her separate life from home. I wait till she tells me. Little bits come out and all the songs.



We pool information from her friend's parents but it's upsetting because I'd like to know.

I'm here to support her all the way along and do the best I can to help her. But I don't know what to do. The reading record is useful, I know exactly what she's doing there but not in maths whatsoever.

Love Lorraine

From: <Debbie@Virgin.net>  
To: <Lorraine@BTInternet.com>  
Subject: Knowledge about school  
Date: July 1995

Dear Lorraine,

Do you know what goes on at school now? We get lots of information by letter, an amazing amount of paper, but little access to the teacher although she's very approachable. The head's very welcoming and open to parents but I'm not sure about the teachers. You feel there's a barrier. I guess they're being professional. The secretary is an important part of the school and really helpful, very approachable.

It's taken me two children to find out what goes on at school. Although Hayley tells me what she does it would've been nice to know about the topics they do each term, we could help then, or right at the beginning to have had a piece of paper with 'this is what we do on Monday, Tuesday etc.' just a general outline. It would be nice to go in and sit in on part of the day, too. They could have a rota to come in and watch. If people know what's going on they feel more confident and secure and can use that as a stepping stone to move on.

I was pleased we had parents' evening because sometimes it's a bit difficult to catch the teacher during the week. You never know what time of day is best and there's no privacy with everyone around. On parents' evening I felt she really knew Hayley but I wanted her to tell us more, rather than us telling her. They need to be skilled at talking to people and how you say it, don't they?

Hayley is staying with the same teacher next term which we're pleased about as it gives her some continuity. Does Stacey stay in the same class?

Deb

From: <Lorraine@BTInternet.com>  
To: <Debbie@Virgin.net>  
Subject: Information about learning  
Date: July 1995

Dear Debbie,

I talked to the teacher in little bits over the first few weeks and I looked in Stacey's books. I couldn't understand the alphabet and would have liked to have been told before she started school about ABC and not big letters and how to go about it.

They're always there to help you. The building helps, being open plan, when you walk in you can see the teachers. I can nip in and say whatever, they're so open and approachable. It's good for Stacey to know that I talk to her teacher, it makes her feel more at ease, like a friendship so that she doesn't feel it's separate from home. If she sees that I get on with her teacher it'll give her more confidence.

It's still like getting blood out of a stone trying to find out what Stacey does at school. I have to read between the lines. I know the theme but don't know the detail of anything. It's private to her. I found that so frustrating as she was our only means of finding out until I went in to help. But I suppose she wants to keep school separate from home. Although sometimes, when she's really proud of something she takes us into the classroom to have a look. And the teacher comes out at the end of the day and talks.

I felt the report didn't say anything academically, we got more on a one to one. I enjoyed the first parents evening. It gave us a good idea of how she was settling in. We were amazed at how much she'd done. The teacher was able to talk about her work in detail. I think that if there were major problems they'd haul me in and tell me, although I'd liked to have known earlier how she was doing socially.

I still find letting go difficult. You have to put your trust in the teachers and the system. I'm not sure about next term. It's such a short gap and then she goes back to a new teacher. Everyone says she's really nice but we've got to get used to her ways. I'll try not to form an opinion till I meet her.

Love Lorraine

## **DISCUSSION**

Knowing the names of key personnel was seen as important but parents in my study found it difficult to get access to this information. The school secretary played an important part in the partnership, particularly at School

A as she was generally the first port of call. Some methods of communication were not always successful.

Reception class teachers at both schools perceived that they were open and responsive to parents and felt it essential to develop links and inform parents of any problems which their child faced. However, parents were soon encouraged to leave their children at the classroom door. Parents considered there was good communication and that reception class teachers were helpful and approachable. Nevertheless, parents had concerns about the best time to approach them and wanted privacy to discuss their child. Teachers felt that they encouraged partnership through the reading record book, parents evenings and encouraging parents to assist in the classroom.

Parents had little knowledge of the structure and content of the school day and relied on their children to enlighten them. However, not all children were forthcoming with this information. The use of 'link books' as vehicles for partnership were helpful in giving an understanding of progress in reading but gave little or no information about other subjects. Through helping in the classroom, some parents gained a greater insight into the school day. For others, their child starting school was an opportunity for them to start a college course, go to work or care for their younger children.

The aims of parents and teachers coincided in areas such as children being successful with their work and well-behaved. Parents perceived that teachers had a good understanding of their children. They wanted to be kept informed of any problems that arose, given information about progress and standards (linked with ages), and direction on ways in which they could contribute to school and their child's learning. They thought that the school was not always aware that information about teaching knowledge was wanted, yet neither did they go out of their way to get it. If parents are to support their child's learning there are implications for teachers to consult with, and inform parents, while respecting and valuing the knowledge, expertise and experience that they bring. A shared understanding may help to avoid assumptions made on both sides.

Parents were able to act as a common transition factor between microsystems for their child where access was encouraged. They saw their child benefiting from their actions as a transition link because it signified to them that school and home were not separate parts of life.

The open-plan nature of School B encouraged a more open partnership as parents felt that they had access to their child's teacher and exercise books. This has now changed as security systems have been installed and the doors kept locked. At School A, a more traditionally built school, many parents felt that they should leave their children at the door rather than enter the melee in the cloakroom.

Parents were not sure what the next partnership would look like. They talked to their children about the forthcoming transition but unless they had an older child who had made a transition they had little information to give and could only go on rumour and speculation. Indeed, many parents were confused about the 'route' that their child would take through school.

#### **4.6.3. YEAR ONE: A NEW PARTNERSHIP**

Pugh (1996, p.26) suggests that professionals provide what they think parents want rather than listen to parents. However, Athey (1990, p.206) indicates the deep commitment that parents have with their child's education if they are included in professional concerns which give clear information related to structures, content and process of children's learning rather than with peripheral issues. Hall, Kay and Struthers (1992, p.140) note that

“if parents are of prime importance in the educational development of the young child, then our educational system must recognise this.”

Many parents wonder if the development of their child is progressing normally and want to know the average stage of development and how their child compares to the norm (Hughes et al 1994, p.169). One way to achieve this might be to give teachers time and support to talk with parents in private.

***Lorraine and Debbie discuss feedback:***

From: <lorraine@btinternet.com>  
To: <debbie@virgin.net>  
Subject: A new partnership  
Date: October 1995

Dear Debbie,

Well, Stacey has a new teacher. The relationship isn't the same as it was in reception. She's still approachable and I'm treated as an equal, but I feel they want her to go in on her own now so I've stepped back a bit. I still want to know what's happening but at the same time I want her to have her independence. I hope the lines of communication stay open.

Stacey still only lets me know what she wants me to know but school keeps me informed about fund raising events and special things. I know more now that I'm going in to help, like the pattern of the day and how things like dinner happen. She likes me being involved.

I want to help her as much as I can without interfering. I don't think the teacher would want me in there all the time. In any case I don't feel the same need to quiz her as I did.

Love Lorraine

From: <debbie@virgin.net>  
To: <lorraine@btinternet.com>  
Subject: same partnership  
Date: October 1995

Dear Lorraine,

Hayley didn't move class this year and has the same teacher. You mentioned the building, but because Hayley's in the demountable it means that you don't go into school. With James the amount of children puts me off going in. With his first teacher she came and stood at the door but with this one she gets closeted round the other side and you never see her.

I want to know whether Hayley's average and what her weaknesses are and her talents. I get frustrated at the level of feedback you get. I would prefer to have the problems and then give us advice on what we can do. It's sometimes hard to know what the school wants.

School needs to give you an opportunity to be involved. I think it's quite important, I don't just want to drop them off and pick them up.

If I keep my link strong to the school I keep the link to my child strong.

Love Deb

From:<lorraine@btinternet.com>

To:>debbie@virgin.net>

Subject: end of Year One

Date: July 1996

Dear Deb,

I felt we were all working together last year, this year I don't go in quite as much, although the teacher's still approachable and you feel connected with the place. The little book is very handy, although I don't use it as much as I did. I don't feel the need to have a teacher-parent relationship now. I'm standing back and letting her get on with it. I just back up what they're doing by finding books for projects. I could be doing it wrong, of course, but I listen to her read and do a bit of maths.

Stacey tells me a lot more than she did. SATs next year are a worry. I only go in now if I need to. If I'm worried I can go and see them and the problem is dealt with straight away. I want to be involved but not invade her territory too much. I don't want them to think I'm one of those neurotic mums!

She's going to a new class but when I heard which teacher she was getting I was quite happy.

Love Lorraine

From:<debbie@virgin.net>

To:<lorraine@btinternet.com>

Subject: Feedback

Date: July 1996

Dear Lorraine

Did you get a school report? Hayley's was soulless, very politically correct. I was surprised that it was classified in subjects but what we want to know is how it relates to what she should do at her age. We went to parents' evening and looked at the books but we don't know if her work's a good or a poor standard. We need to be informed about what stage she's at if we're going to support her.

And next year there'll be a big jump to the juniors. We went to the SATs evening which was useful.

There's been a caretaker head this term. The last one knew all the children by name and had a nice way with her. The new one's done a smashing job but it's not the same now, I'm afraid. If there's anything I want to discuss they're there but I don't feel the school wants the same level of involvement now. I've felt out of touch this term. Hayley's teacher is still very approachable but there's this reorganisation which was a bit of a shock. An explanation would have helped, we thought she was going to a Year 2 class and now we don't know. Anyway they're changing all the classes and Hayley's going to have a new teacher. It would've been nice if she'd put in an appearance at parents' evening then we could have reassured Hayley over the holiday. I dread her having someone mean. I want someone who is sympathetic to her.

Have a lovely holiday. See you soon.

Love Deb.

## ***DISCUSSION***

At the beginning of Year One, for those parents with children who only had one term in the Reception class, there was concern about continuity of teacher. At School A all the summer-born children stayed together with the same teacher but at School B children either went to a different teacher or new children joined their class.

Parents said that, although they did not feel the same need to be involved with transitions as they were during the induction to school, they helped with the transition by talking about it and encouraging friendships. However, parents need a knowledge base from which to talk. As one parent said



“if we know the routine we can help. She’s been concerned about where the toilets are, which group she’ll be in . . . . It’s the social things, knowing the routines that are important.”

The schools felt that there was little need to support parents through the transition from class to class.

There was a reduced partnership in Year One. Parents were encouraged to take a supportive rather than an active role in the partnership. Staff no longer went outside to meet parents at the end of the day and parents only visited the teacher if there was a problem or if the teacher invited them into school. Parents were expected to leave their child at the entrance to encourage independence. Although many children did not want their parents to take them further than this, the underlying message that this might give is that the partnership has finished and for those children who would welcome their parent acting as a transitional link they might feel pressured into not using this support.

All parents felt the need to be involved with school but did not feel the same need as they did at first. There were comments about “taking a step back”. Parents had put their trust in the school and now saw their role as a supportive one to “augment the school. Let the school dictate and we do a bit extra”. Nevertheless, there were anxieties that perhaps they might be “doing it all wrong” and needed continuing guidance of what to do at home.

With the forthcoming move to Year Two (Y2) parents started to be concerned about the transition to Key Stage Two. For those parents who did not know the Y2 teacher, they would have liked to have met her. Parents wanted to know the way in which the classes were to be divided as they were concerned about friendship groups being disrupted. They were confused over the changed 'route' through school at School A and a few worried about Standard Attainment Tests (SATs). This was mainly linked to a lack of understanding about the nature of classroom experiences and whether or not their child was achieving at an average level.

#### **4.6.4. YEAR TWO: ANOTHER PARTNERSHIP**

Nutbrown (1994, p.140) suggests that the Education Reform Act 1988 far from placing parents in control has instead excluded them. The Parent's Charter states that successful education is achieved through being 'an active partner' with the school and its teachers (DFE 1994, p.25). Ball (1994) elaborates on this:

"Real partnership demands a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect, and willingness to negotiate. It requires open, regular and reciprocal communication, where achievements are celebrated, problems confronted, solutions sought and policies implemented *jointly and together*."  
(Ball 1994, p.44)

That is not to suggest that there is only one way to work with parents for each is different. Rather, the teacher is "tuned in to the particular needs of individual families" (Bruce 1997, p.152).

***Lorraine and Debbie discuss the reduced partnership:***

From: <lorraine@btinternet.com>

To: <debbie@virgin.net>

Subject: partnership waning

Date: October 1996

Dear Deb,

Well, the ground work is done and I've got to stand back. The teacher doesn't want you in there now. In terms of a dialogue I think that's probably ended as far as they're concerned. I don't think there's any pretence on their part that there's a partnership. Open evenings are still very good but I feel there's a bigger distance. But I suppose that's right, better for independence. She knows she's at school.

I don't want to poke my nose in but I still want to be involved and will want to know how she's progressing and hope I can help. Reading is easy to keep up with but I don't know about maths. I can go and ask if there's a problem.

Lorraine

From: <debbie@virgin.net>

To: <lorraine@btinternet.com>

Subject: door still open

Date: October 1996

Dear Lorraine,

We have a new head but we didn't know who she was! She should have worn a badge then we'd have been able to welcome her. In fact that first morning was dreadful! I felt quite anxious and got quite agitated because it was difficult finding the classroom and I didn't know where the cloakroom was. We really needed a session last term about the next class.

School now feels like a warm up for the move to the junior school - I'm dreading that move. Everything is driven by the SATs now. I want Hayley's needs to be a priority and for her to work at her pace, not be pushed by the school wanting to be up in the league tables. I would like to go in and talk but work starts at the classroom door now and you go in and out very quickly. In a funny sort of way I don't need to be involved now. I'm sure they'd contact us if there was a problem. Like you, I still want to support the school and want feedback. It's an important year and I want to know what to do.

Love Deb

**DISCUSSION**

Preparations are important at each transition both for the children and their parents, with the receiving teacher playing an important part in this continuing partnership.

Parents wanted to be prepared for the transition to Y2 and be given information at the end of Y1 so they were ready for first day of the new term. They wanted introductions to staff and there was concern that they did not know how to prepare their child or that the change might unsettle their child. Only a third of parents felt prepared. There were several anxieties which resulted in their reduced emotional well-being. These included not knowing the teacher, where to go or what to do because of “not knowing what was going on”. *There was further pressure as parents felt that it was an important year with forthcoming SATs and they wanted it to start well.* As one parents said

“you expect the transition to be better prepared than it was”

One reason for these anxieties might be that parents see time passing very quickly. As one parent said

“It’s her last year in the infants and it’s hard to countenance. I’ve had to make myself realise that she’s already in Year Two and she’ll be ready for the juniors soon.”

At the start of Y2 parents saw their role in the partnership with school as a supportive one although they felt the partnership declining. Some

mentioned their role changing as their children grew more independent. However, they still wanted to be involved with school, for the school to keep them informed and to give them guidance on how to support their child's learning. Thus there was a reliance on the school to lead and dictate partnership. Staff felt that parents were "weaning themselves off gradually" and that "we see less of the parents but it's still very much a partnership". One teacher said "I don't have a great deal to do with the parents". Thus it would seem that partnership is not developed.

#### 4.6.5. END OF KEY STAGE ONE

From:<lorraine@btinternet.com>

To:<debbie@virgin.net>

Subject: move to KS2

Date: July 1997

Dear Deb,

I'm not happy about her leaving Mrs Grey. She's growing up so quickly, I've lost my little girl. It's a big move to the juniors, more traumatic. I'd like to see the teacher and the classroom before she goes. I've talked to her about it and told her she's going to be with her friends.

We had a good report so it wasn't worth going in. Next term we have to wait for the children to come to us because they're in the other building which isn't open-plan. I've heard her teacher in the juniors is fair but strict, but we'll wait and see. The teacher she's got now is strict, but she's wonderful!

Lorraine

From:<debbie@virgin.net>

To:<lorraine@btinternet.com>

Subject:

Date: July 1997

Dear Lorraine,

Thanks for the e-mail. Yes, we've talked about the move to the junior school when *she's* brought it up but we haven't made too

much of it. I've tried to put her mind at rest and James has told her all about it. The children wrote down who they wanted to be with but I don't know if they'll take any notice of it. But that's life and you have to get on with it. We went to the school to visit on Wednesday. They took us round the school and were introduced to the teachers. I think the children will visit but the school haven't told us.

I was pleased with the SAT results. I've now got the confidence to tell her she's okay. A report at the end isn't enough, we need feedback along the way.

The juniors means another beginning. I'll miss the infants but I'm pleased she's going to have an experienced teacher. Have a good summer.

Love Debbie

## ***DISCUSSION***

At School A the parents' visit and induction session to the Junior School was welcomed and gave parents a sense that their child was not "going off into the wide world" by themselves. Parents felt that there were good links between the two schools and appreciated their children making visits to their new class, although parents would have liked some indication beforehand of when this was going to take place.

All the parents felt that they had developed a close partnership with the infant school and, for those who did not have younger children, would miss the contact and involvement with school and the friendships which had developed while 'waiting at the gate'.

At School B the parents thought that they would miss the close contact with the KS1 staff and the ability to ‘pop in’ whenever necessary. Those with younger children were grateful that this opportunity would still be there, but those without younger ones felt that this is the end of an era and would now “feel isolated from the school”. This is mainly due to the nature of the building and the need to wait outside for their children at the end of the day. This physical distance is translated into a distancing from the teacher and an inability to contact her.

Parents thought that they, too, would like some form of induction such as they had received at the start of school in order to meet the teacher and see the classroom before their child started at KS2. (Parents of the summer born cohort were not shown round the school during the initial induction and therefore have little knowledge of the building.) They thought that this would benefit the partnership, would help them in preparing their child and would give their child confidence by knowing that their parents also knew something about the juniors.

### *Summary*

*My research found that:*

- *Before children started school parents were not sure what the home/school partnership would look like and expected the school to take the lead.*
- *Many parents felt that they wanted to support their children at home but were not sure how to do this and would welcome the school helping them.*
- *Parents were not always sure about learning that takes place at school.*
- *Parents wanted to be kept informed of their child's progress and to discuss this in private.*
- *Parents found parents' evenings useful but wanted additional feedback.*
- *Parents wanted information at each transition point.*
- *Where access was encouraged parents acted as transitional links between microsystems. This benefited the child.*
- *Parental involvement became supportive rather than active as children proceeded through school. Information exchange reduced which reintroduced feelings of not knowing what to do to support child at home.*
- *Teachers thought parents no longer wanted to come into school; parents thought that teachers no longer welcomed them at school.*
- *Parents wanted an induction for themselves to KS2 and were pleased when this happened.*
- *Parents would miss the contact that they had had with the KS1 setting when their children moved to KS2.*



## 4.7.

### TRANSITIONS THROUGH KEY STAGE ONE

**“I think the parents are more bothered about the transitions than the children”**

**(Parent at School A)**

Transitions in this study are seen as:

- a change of teacher during, or at the end of, a year;
- a long term physical move for children from one classroom to another during, or at the end of, a year;
- a group of children moving into or out of a class either during, or at the end of, a year.

This chapter looks at those transitions that children make through KS1 and, in particular, friendship patterns, continuity of teacher, children's adjustment to new systems and the amount of moves that children make before going to Key Stage Two (KS2).

Both schools have three intakes of children a year which follows the LEA policy. The children start school in the term that they are 4.8 years old. At the point when I was negotiating access to the school, School A had an intake system of one term in Reception (YR) with the children moving to a Reception/Year One (YR/Y1) class at the end of one term. However, this was changed for the group that I started to follow, to four YR/Y1 classes. The headteacher's intention was that the 1994 September intake children and the 1995 January intake would then join some Year Two (Y2) children to form Year One/ Year Two Y1/Y2 classes at the end of the reception year (September 1995) and stay with that teacher for two years through Year One (Y1) and Year Two (Y2). This was not to be the case for, in the meantime, a temporary headteacher was appointed in the summer of 1996 (the end of Y1) and the classes changed for September 1996 into three Y2 classes and one Y1/Y2 class. The summer 1995 intake started as a separate reception class and stayed with that teacher throughout Y1, moving to a Y1/Y2 or a Y2 class for their final year at KS1. They transferred from the school at end of KS1 to junior schools in the area. The majority making the transition to the nearby school.

In School B the September 1994 intake started together in one class and were joined in January 1995 by another intake. At the beginning of the summer term 1995 the younger of these children formed another class together with a new intake, making two reception classes altogether. In September 1995 the September and January intakes from 1994/1995 (now Y1 children) went to one of two Y1/Y2 class and stayed with the same teacher for two years. When the summer 1995 intake became Y1 children

they either moved to another teacher as a YR/Y1 class or stayed with the same teacher as a YR/Y1 class. As Y2 they moved again to one of the Y1/Y2 classes. There was no transition out of this school at Y2/Y3 as it is a primary school. The children transferred to Y3 which is in a different building but on the same site. (It was originally built as two separate schools.)

These 'routes' through school are outlined in more detail below (Section 4.7.2).

In this chapter we meet our 'composite children' Hayley, Stacey and her friend Stephanie, playing together at various points through their school life (end of YR, end of Y1, beginning of Y2 and end of Y2) and see their perceptions of the transitions that they make. We also hear from their teachers. Their parents' perceptions are included in the discussions which follow each section.

The literature is concerned with friendship patterns.

#### **4.7.1. FRIENDSHIP**

It is not always possible to maintain the same groups of children through school, due to circumstances such as the number of children and fluctuating staffing allocations which determine the type of organisation adopted (Cleave and Brown 1991, p.30). Nonetheless, Gura (1996, p.146) outlines the importance for children of other children in school. She suggests that making, having and keeping friends must be planned for as part of a whole curriculum in the early years. Certainly, Winterhoff suggests (1997, p.246) that teacher attitudes and practices about friendship influence friendship development patterns.

Peer groups have a special significance as many children can expect to be with the same group of children for several years and it can provide a sense of continuity in the midst of change (Gura 1996, p.38). At times of stress, such as transition, peers can also be important as “the presence of a friend brings a degree of security” (Rutter and Rutter 1992, p.147). Hartup (1991) suggests that as an emotional resource

“friendships furnish children with the security to strike out into new territory, meet new people, and tackle new problems”.

Cleave and Brown (1991) found that for children to be in the same class for two years enabled friendships to be developed and gave children a feeling of stability.

Winterhoff (1997) and Corsaro (1981) outline the way in which the setting influences the ‘developmental fluidity’ of friendships. Winterhoff suggests that the setting either supports or constrains friendships depending upon whether or not children have visual contact with one another. The structures and organisation of the setting which are devised and dictated by adults, therefore, limit the selection of children’s friends from the pool of possible social partners. For example, the class to which children are assigned controls their friendships during lesson time in that their particular friends may be in another class. This is significant for collaborative learning in that

“friends show a higher level of cooperation with one another than do acquaintances or children who do not know one another”.

(Rutter and Rutter 1992, p.147)

## 4.7.2. EXAMPLES OF THE JOURNEY THROUGH SCHOOL

### SCHOOL A

- 1) Some of the September 1994 intake children encountered three teachers, three rooms and four different groups of children through KS1. Some children had the same teacher in Y2 as they did in reception. Some children had a change of teacher during Y2 due to a teacher retiring at Easter 1997:

<u>Sept. 1994 YR</u>	<u>January 1995 YR</u>	<u>Sept. 1995 Y1</u>	<u>Sept. 1996 Y2</u>
Joined one class of four classes of Y1 children	Same room and teacher. Some January intake join class	Different room and teacher. Y1/Y2 class	Different room and teacher. Year Two class with children from other classes.

- 2) Some January 1995 intake children had two teachers, two classrooms and met three groups of children through KS1. In some cases children moved rooms at Y1 as new classrooms were built. Some children had two teachers in Y1 due to a member of staff leaving at Easter 1996:

<u>January 1995 YR</u>	<u>September 1995 Y1</u>	<u>September 1996 Y2</u>
Joined one of four established reception/Y1 class	Same teacher and classroom. New group of reception children join class, older children from previous class move to another room.	Year 2 class. Some new children join the class. Different teacher and classroom.

- 3) The April 1995 intake met two teachers, two classrooms and two different groups of children through KS1:

<u>April 1995 YR</u> Summer intake reception children start as a group together.	<u>September 1995 Y1</u> Children stayed in same classroom with same teacher and same children.	<u>September 1996 Y2</u> Moved to Y1/Y2 class. Different room and teacher. Some different children.
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The September and January intakes joined four established Y1 classes for three and two terms respectively before moving to another class. The April intake formed a separate YR class and stayed with the same teacher for four terms before moving to a Y1/Y2 class for their final year.

#### **SCHOOL B**

- 1) The September 1994 intake encountered three teachers, (two of whom were a job-share) two classrooms and four groups of different children through KS1:

<u>Sept. 1994 YR</u> Small (12) September Reception intake. Two teachers job-share	<u>January 1995 YR</u> Joined by January intake. Two teachers job-share.	<u>April 1995 YR</u> Stayed in same room with one of the job-share teachers. Some January intake move to another class.	<u>Sept. 1995 Y1</u> Move to new classroom. Y1/Y2 class. Different teacher.	<u>Sept. 1996 Y2</u> Same teacher and room. Previous Y2 move to another class and joined by Y1 children and summer born Y2 children
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- 2) Some January 1995 intake had three teachers, (two of whom were a job-share) two classrooms and meet four groups of different children through KS1:

<u>January 1995</u> <u>YR</u>	<u>April 1995 YR</u>	<u>September 1995</u> <u>Y1</u>	<u>September 1996</u> <u>Y2</u>
Joined an established reception class. Two job-share teachers.	Moved classroom. Stayed with one of the same teachers. Summer intake join class.	Move to new classroom. Y1/Y2 class. Different teacher.	Same teacher and classroom. Previous Y2 move to another class and joined by Y1 children and summer-born Y2 children

- 3) Some April 1995 intake had three teachers, three classrooms and met three groups of different children through KS1:

<u>April 1995 YR</u>	<u>September 1995 Y1</u>	<u>September 1996 Y2</u>
Reception class comprising the youngest January intake and summer-born children.	Moved classrooms. Different teacher. September 1995 Reception children join class.	Moved classrooms. Y1/Y2 class. Rejoin some January 1995 intake, that they had been with in the summer of 1995, and some September 1995 intake who are now Y1. Different teacher.

The September intake formed a YR class and the January intake joined them. This was taught by two teachers on a job-share basis. The summer intake formed a new class with the youngest children from the January intake. Each (job-share) teacher then taught full time. This meant that for

some children they made their first transition from one class to another in the term after they started school.

As can be seen from the above, the summer born children at School A had significantly fewer moves than their autumn born peers. Summer born children at School B, on the other hand, had more physical moves to deal with than their autumn born peers. If summer-born children are already disadvantaged (Pascal, 1990; Woodhead, 1989; Williams, 1998; Sharp, 1995) then it is likely that the amount of transitions may add to this further if there are discontinuities which require a complete restructuring of what went before.

#### **4.7.3. FROM RECEPTION TO YEAR ONE: Pre-liminal Confusion**

Stacey: Hayley are you going to another class after the holiday?

Hayley: Don't know. I just go to school. My brother's having a new teacher.

Stacey: But are **you**?

Hayley: No, I don't think so.

Stephanie: I am. I'm going to my brother's class. We'll do more things and harder work.

Stacey: So am I. Some of my friends are coming in with me. I want to know what work I'm going to do and what there is to play with, what toys. When I've finished all of the classes I'll go to secondary.

Stephanie: You're not going to Mrs Grey's. You're going to Mrs Coral's.



### **DISCUSSION**

Children wanted to know about the activities and the people in the class to which they were transferring. Some children thought that because they

were moving to the room where their older sibling was taught, that they would be with them. This was not the case as the older sibling also moved to another class.

School A summer-born children did not realise that they would be progressing to another year group as they were staying with the same teacher and same children in the same room. At School B, on the other hand, summer-born children who were moving knew that they would be going to a different class but thought that it would be with the September and January intake. This may have been exacerbated by a transitional activity where the children had story-time once a week in their year groups. In reality the summer-born children were being formed into two classes with new reception class children joining each of them. This gave rise to further confusion later because Y1 children became 'big' ones whereas their Y1 friends in a Y1/Y2 class were 'the young ones'.

At School A parents of summer-born children were pleased that their children would stay with their friends and the same teacher in Y1. This continuity meant that they did not notice the transition from Reception to Y1. The parents of the January intake were pleased that their children would be staying with the same teacher in a YR/Y1 class. One class was going to have a new teacher and there was concern that the parents had not met the teacher. The parents of the autumn intake saw the move to a



Y1/Y2 class as a major step but had reservations about their children being in the next class for two years.

At School B parents of summer-born children thought that their children were disadvantaged not only because they only had one term in the Reception class but also because their first transition through school came very soon after starting. For those summer-born children who were not moving, parents were pleased that their children would have continuity of teacher and classroom, although they would be separated from many of their friends.

“I’m glad she isn’t going into another class. Glad she’ll have the same teachers ‘cos she’s only been there for a term. She’s better in the same environment”.

Parents of those children who were transferring from a YR class to a Y1/Y2 class saw this first transition as a significant move and were pleased if their children were moving with their friends. These children would be with one teacher for the following two years and parents considered this continuity of benefit to their child. This reaction was the opposite of those parents at School A.

#### **4.7.4. LINKING YEAR ONE TO YEAR TWO: Friendship Paths**

Miss B: They’ll be coming for a visit soon. The Y1 that were with YR have a bigger gap than those who’ve been with a Y2 group. It’s going to hit them like a bomb when they move up. The summer birthdays aren’t as mature, you can see a big difference.

Mrs Grey: It's good for them to come from different classes. They'll pal up and look after each other and re-establish friendships

Miss B: Some of them won't know the names of those from different classes. I'll do lots of circle time but they'll stay in their groups and I'll be able to tell who came from where.

Mrs Grey: There's going to be more expected of them next year. The amount of work they've got to get through . . .

Miss B: Yes, we'll have a chat about the hard work when they come to visit.



Stephanie: Stacey, whose class are you going into after the holiday?

Stacey: The same as you! I'll miss Mrs Coral but it's going to be nice going to a new teacher.

Stephanie: I'll have had two years with Mrs Grey. She's my favourite teacher. She's better than the other teachers. But when there's little ones she'll take more time with them.

Stacey: What's it like? Do you have a different dinner lady? Is it harder? I'd like to know where everything is.

Stephanie: Being in green group is hard work. I hope I'm not in green group. We'll do harder work, lots and lots of work in Year Two. It's going to be good.

Stacey: It's going to be good fun. I'll be older than now. Reception will think we're old. I'll feel very big. I'll be taller and my hair will be longer and

Together: and we'll run faster!

Stephanie: I think it'll be like more grown up because there'll be little ones to help. There'll be new Year Ones from the other classes. The little ones might be scared, some of them don't know us.

Stacey: Some of my friends are going in the other class but when it's playtime or lunch time I'll be able to see them. I think at playtimes I'll see the Year Ones. It'll feel different.

Stephanie: Most of my friends will stay in the same class but some are moving up. I'll be sad but if you're separated you get more friends. You've got the old ones and the new ones!



## **DISCUSSION**

The children looked forward to moving from Y1 to Y2 and were pleased if they were moving with a friend or to a class where a friend was already established. They used friends who were already in the next class to gain an

insight into the new setting. Children expressed disappointment at being separated from close friends but resolved to see them at communal times and make additional friends. Any concerns about the move revolved round difficulty of work and location of equipment in the classroom.

If the children were to have continuity of teacher this was seen as an advantage as they knew her temperament and systems, although there was concern about the amount of time she might allocate to 'new' children. If they were having a different teacher there were mixed emotions in that they would miss the present one but looked forward to having a different one.

Those who had been a Y1 child in a mixed Reception/Y1 class saw themselves as the 'old' ones and, as a result had gained in confidence. Y1 children who had been in a Y1 class had only experienced one teacher, one classroom and one group of children since starting school. The class would be divided and some children were upset at not having the support of their friends. Children who had been a Y1 child in a mixed Y1/Y2 class saw themselves as more experienced. They were confident but wary of the unknown if they were moving classrooms to be with a different teacher and different children. If they were staying in the same room with the same teacher they were confident because they had seen what Y2 looked like and knew that it held no fears.

Parents were pleased if their child was moving with a close friend. This held great importance, but equally parents wanted their child to continue developing further friendships. Several parents at School B mentioned that due to the transitions that the year group had made as a whole, there had been much fragmentation of friendships. This was seen as both an advantage and a disadvantage. Some of the concern of dividing and re-grouping was whether or not children who had been with a Y2 class would recognise that those Y1 children moving from a R/Y1 class were also Y2 and be accepted back into their year group. Parents said that their child could cope with changes if they had gained social confidence and that this was a key factor in each transition.

Parents were pleased if their children were informed about the transition to Y2 but they, too, would like to meet the teacher and receive information about the transition. Although parents did not feel the same need to be involved with transitions as they were at the start of school, they wanted to help their child by talking about the move from an informed base. For those children with older brothers and sisters there was further insight into what might take place in the next class.

31% of parents mentioned that the move to KS2 would be a major transition in their child's life the following year. Perhaps by implication this would be a major step for them, too. Some were resigned to the yearly

upheaval. As one parent said “they’ve got to move them and you hope for the best”.

Several parents mentioned having to be careful about the term “being a big one” when talking to their child as this notion changes. Before they started school, children were looking forward to “being a big one”. Now for those in a Y1/Y2 class they are looking forward to being “a big one” again while those who have been in a Reception/Y1 class have been “a big one” all year. There is also the problem of role reversal for some children according to the place they hold in the family. For example those who are “big ones” at school are sometimes the youngest in the family at home, for others they are the “little ones” at school but the oldest child at home and therefore “big brother” or “big sister”.

Parents’ expectations were that their child would continue to become more independent in Y2, although they were “expecting it to be quite a tough beginning” and “it’s going to be harder”. Another worry was whether or not their child would cope with the work or “get swallowed up in the National Curriculum”. There was a dichotomy of feeling between the expected difficulty of work and yet at the same time knowing that work would be matched to their child’s level of attainment.

Parents at School A were agreed that it was time for a move, even those who the previous year had been pleased that their child was to have had two years with one teacher. For those children who were in a YR/Y1 class, parents thought that this had given their child confidence and security.

As regards the transition to Y2 at School B, parents of those children in a Reception/Y1 class were agreed that it was time for a move. Those parents with Y1 children already with a Y2 group did not see the move from Y1 to Y2 as a transition, more as a continuation of the same teacher and were pleased that their children have had an insight into Y2. One parent said that “it’s lucky he’s not having another move. The stability is important”. These children had made one transition at the end of their Reception Year and it was this transition (from YR to Y1) that was seen as a major move. Comments included “Reception to Y1 was the biggest move” and

“it would have been better to have stayed in the Reception class last year but it’ll pay dividends next year . . . he’ll know what to expect; he’s more street wise”.

#### **4.7.5. BEGINNING OF YEAR TWO: Incorporation**

Stacey: I like being in Mrs Grey’s class, she’s nice. It’s really good fun. I do nice things and work with my friends.

Hayley: Ours is funny. There’s quite a lot of new people in it but I’m still with some of my old friends. After you’ve finished all your work you can go and play. I don’t like my teacher, she shouts.

Stacey: Ours doesn’t. At first I felt new again because I have play before and after dinner and in Year One I just had one play. I made friends with Lucy when she came to our class.

Hayley: I’ve made lots of new friends but some of my special friends went in another class. I’m really missing Emma.

Stacey: After lunch we have quiet time reading a book and you have to be quiet when you're working.

Hayley: We have to be quiet 'cos we're by the library and we can look at lots of books. Come on, let's play . . .



### ***DISCUSSION***

By October half term all the children except one felt established in their Y2 class. This was to do with transferring with their friends, the nature of the relationship with their teacher and the level of work. One said that “when I first started school I didn't want to come, but I do now”. All the children were with some of their friends and had made new friends as a result of the move. Three were concerned that they had been separated from their close friends in the move. They felt competent at finding where resources in the classroom were kept, they all knew the class rules and were confident with the level of work. Areas with which children were anxious were the work load, lack of play, pupil/teacher relationships and assembly.

Parents felt that their children's friendships are of great importance and were pleased that their children moved, for the most part, with their friends. They hoped that due to the change of class, new friendships would come about and old friendships would be re-established. Most parents felt that it was the right time for their child to move to another class. Only one would have preferred her child to have stayed in the same class and one felt it would have been better to transfer earlier. There were comments that they “were ready to go up” and “they've got to get used to change”.

After six weeks in Y2 seven parents at School A felt that their child had settled quickly and five that their child had taken some time. Indeed one was still not sure that her child had settled. There were a number of influencing factors for children settling into the class:

- being with their friends;
- the teacher;
- status;
- attitude to new situations and people;
- time and familiarity; and
- having a routine.

Reasons for not settling included:

- not being with their friends;
- not knowing the physical layout of the building; and
- the teacher's attitude and ability to meet different learning styles.

One parent summarised this by saying:

“The preparation into Y2 was minimal. The transfer arrangements were brief and a list of assumptions were made - that they [the children] knew the teacher and the school”.

At School B, of the four summer-born children who moved classroom, teacher and peer group, one parent felt that her daughter had settled very quickly while the others thought that their children had taken some time to settle and had found “the change hard to cope with”. There were a number of influencing factors. For the one that settled quickly it was that she had gained confidence as she had “gone from being a big one [a Y1 in a YR/Y1 class] to being a big one [a Y2]” in her present class. For the others who had not settled so easily it was that “he’d effectively been in a Reception



class for the last year” and therefore thought as a reception child, that “everyone in the class is older” and that she was “worried that the work was too hard”.

#### **4.7.6. TRANSITION FROM YEAR TWO TO YEAR THREE (KEY STAGE TWO): Looking Forward**

Stacey: We’re going to the juniors after the holiday. It’ll be fun.

Hayley: So am I! Isn’t it exciting? I feel a little bit good and a little bit sad.

Stephanie: Yes. We’ll have to say goodbye to Mrs Grey. I’ll miss all my little friends and the teachers.

Hayley: Me too. It’s very big and I might be nervous. People will stare when you’re new.

Stacey: And there’ll be bullies.

All together: Ugh!

Stacey: Are you going to be in the same class as Emma?

Hayley: Yes! And I’ve got some friends already up there. And my brother’s there.

Stephanie: Me and Stacey’ll be in different classes again. We’ll only see each other at playtime. We’ll make new friends, though. Have you been to see your new school?

Hayley: We’ve seen a bit. The big girls and boys showed us. We’re going to visit again and stay for an hour!

Stacey: We usually have a look around before we move up. Mrs Grey’ll take us soon and we’ll meet our new teacher.

Hayley: I hope mine’s going to be nice and friendly. I hope she doesn’t shout. She’s got ginger hair and she’s tall.

Stacey: Mine’s going to be kind.

Stephanie: Samantha thinks ours is going to be bossy and give you lots of homework.

Hayley: We’ll have to be really quiet and have to be much more behaved.

Stephanie: And you have hard work and you can’t ask for words!

Stacey: You won’t be able to choose. The moment you finish one piece of work you have to start another piece!

Hayley: I want to see some of the work to see how hard it is. P’raps if we did hard work now it’d be easier when we get there.

Stacey: Or we could do things about Mrs Grey next term.

Hayley: The teachers could come and visit us!



**DISCUSSION**

Children's feelings about going to the juniors were a mixture of nervousness and excitement. All but two were looking forward to KS2, making new friends and seeing the old ones from last year. However, four children were worried about bullies and one about the first playtime. Fourteen of the children said that they would miss their infant teacher and ten of them their friends who are staying in KS1.

At the point when I interviewed the children (mid-July 1997), those at School A had made one visit to their new school: At School B (a primary school) the children would make a single visit in the last week of term. Even though they had met their teacher, either through a visit or because they were in the same school, none of the children felt that they knew her and in some instances, far from calming anxieties, these had increased. To ease the transition several children suggested having the opportunity to make further visits, do some work there and see some examples of work from the present Y3.

Parents thought that, although the transition to KS2 was a big step for them, for their children it was a natural progression as they were ready for the move to the next 'life-stage'. Many children had friends who had transferred to KS2 the previous year or would move with their friends this year and parents thought that this would help the transition.

Parents envisaged few problems in the transition but identified some that might occur:

1. toilets, lunch time, collection of money and other domestic arrangements in the first few days;
2. missing friends left behind in KS1 or who have moved to other classes;
3. bullying from older children; and
4. coping with an increased and different workload.

Parents felt that they had helped their children in the move to KS2 in a number of ways:

1. talking with their children;
2. making them aware of the differences between KS1 and KS2;
3. giving them encouragement;
4. listening to their worries;
5. emphasising the positive; and
6. walking through the grounds.

Older siblings and friends also helped by giving their younger children an idea of what they might expect.

Parents felt that, on the whole, the schools were effective in making the transition to KS2 a smooth one for the children. Visits by the KS2 staff to see the children, KS1 teachers talking to their class about the move, children going to see their new classrooms and meeting their new teacher in

situ and knowing who s/he was beforehand were all seen as helpful, confidence-building exercises prior to the move.

### *Summary*

#### *My research found that:*

- *The amount of changes were significant in that some summer-born at one school made more transitions than their older peers.*
- *Some children make up to five transitions during KS1.*
- *There was transition confusion for some children over which teacher, classroom and children they would be with in their next class.*
- *Older friends and siblings gave children some insight into the next transition.*
- *Parents appreciated their children moving with their friends, but equally, wanted their children to develop a wide circle of friends.*
- *During transitions, friendships were a significant factor in maintaining children's security.*
- *Children were sometimes confused about their status due to phrases about their relative size.*
- *Teachers were aware of children not knowing one another when groups have been brought together from diverse sources during a transition.*
- *The receiving teacher plays an important part in assisting children in becoming acquainted with each others' names and in helping to develop friendships.*
- *Parents wanted information before the transition about where to take children at the beginning of term and which children would be in the class.*
- *Continuity of teacher was seen as important by parents.*
- *Children's confidence levels were important in the transitions.*
- *Parents see the transition from KS1 to KS2 as a major step in and welcomed an induction for themselves as well as their children at this stage.*
- *Children would regret parting from their final KS1 teacher.*

## 4.8.

### CHANGES AND DEVELOPMENTS

**“We fine tune as we go along” (Headteacher, School A).**

**“Each time we’re getting better at it”**

**(Induction co-ordinator, School B).**

It was not the intention that this would be an action research study but, inevitably, when an area comes under scrutiny, changes take place. Many of the changes have been gradual and would have happened anyway. Others have come about as a direct result of my research either through discussion or because of the written feedback from the findings.

This chapter explores some of the changes (deliberate or circumstantial) that have occurred in the two schools to their induction programmes and transitions management, during the time that my research has been taking place.

It asks:

- What purpose does induction serve?
- How effective was the induction from the staff’s perspective?
- What changes would they like to see?
- What changes have taken place to the induction and transition systems?
- What alternative induction strategies might have been used?
- How is the programme evaluated?

We leave our composite characters behind and hear what the staff have to say about induction and transition.

#### **4.8.1. THE INDUCTION PROGRAMMES FOR 1994/95**

School A had an extensive programme of visits before the children started school. The first one was just for parents at which they received documentation from the headteacher, met the secretary, chair of governors and school nurse who outlined their roles and responsibilities. The

headteacher talked to the parents about the various paper work, explained the induction process, the school prospectus, areas of the curriculum, health and safety, school association and class organisation.

Following this meeting, the children with their parents (divided into two groups) visited on four alternate Monday afternoons. A classroom was set out with activities and parents encouraged to work with their child and also begin to complete the pre-school profile. This is a booklet in which the parents give information about their child's development and in which their child completes activities which are based on these practical sessions. For example naming colours and shapes, copying numbers and sequencing. In small groups the parents and children were given a tour of the school by the headteacher. This focused on key people and the geography of the school in order to allay fears of such things as the toilets and the headteacher's office. The afternoon finished with the headteacher telling all the children a story in the hall and encouraging the children to take part in some physical activities while their parents watched.

Two further visits were arranged. A visit to a whole school special event and a final visit for the children to meet their teacher while the headteacher talked to the parents about reading and maths and answered any questions. This format was followed each term.

When the children started school on the first day of term they all started at the same time and attended mornings only, including lunch, for the first week. After that they attended full time. The September and January intakes joined one of four mixed Reception and Year One classes, the April intake started as a new Reception class.

School B had one Reception class with two (job share) teachers for the autumn and spring terms. They both taught full time in the summer term when an additional Reception class was started. School B had a range of induction procedures depending on the time of year. The parents and children for the September intake were offered one afternoon visit for parents and children and an opportunity to visit for a lunch time. On the afternoon visit when the group was assembled the headteacher invited the children to go with him to the classroom where one of the reception class teachers greeted the children. The other teacher explained to the parents about bringing their child on the first day, lunch time, PE kit, parent helpers and what to do if they had any concerns. She went on to talk about reading. The headteacher returned and talked about the School Association and the school prospectus. He then took the parents on a tour of the school. The children spent the afternoon in their classroom engaged in activities with their two teachers. The January intake had a similar introductory afternoon session plus two lunch time visits and ten afternoon sessions with the class teacher and the September intake children. The April intake had the introductory session, two lunch time visits (one for sandwiches and one for

a cooked meal) and eight afternoon sessions with the September and January intake children. However, when they started school the year-group was divided into two classes. The older ones (September to March birthdays) in one class, the younger ones (March to August birthdays) in the other. Many parents of the new intake had not realised that this was the case and thought that their children were starting in a reception class of summer born children. The new children all started full time on the first morning of term.

#### ***4.8.2. PRACTITIONERS' PERCEPTIONS***

Both schools have a written induction policy and see the induction as being helpful in familiarising children with the school environment in order to help them settle.

At School A the headteacher managed the induction, although her original plan was to establish a system and hand it over to staff. She decided not to do this as she found that she was able to get to know the families and avert any problems before they occurred. She saw the induction as

“beginning the partnership before they come through the door. I can begin to establish a purposeful relationship and they see where I am coming from. It’s taken the sting out of some situations.”

She saw the visits as helping children and parents to feel welcome and for them to begin to understand

“what school is about these days, to get a feeling of the regime and the opportunities that children bring with them”.



The four members of staff who taught the Reception and Year 1 classes thought that the induction was useful in as much as the children were able to familiarise themselves with the building, begin to make friends and gain confidence. They considered it important that parents were informed about the teaching of reading, became “at ease with the school” and met each other. However, the staff do not meet the parents and only see the children once before they start school. They felt that they would like to see the children two or three times and meet their parents. This would help them learn the children’s names, begin the parent-teacher partnership and also help at the beginning of term in knowing with whom to send each child home at the end of the day. As it was it “took a while to know who belonged to who”. They also felt “in the dark” about what the headteacher had said to the parents during the meetings.

At School B the Early Years co-ordinator was responsible for the induction programme and she, too, saw it as “establishing a home-school partnership link” where parents

“see a warm, friendly environment when their children start school and that we, as teachers, are approachable and human”.

The co-ordinator felt that it is important for the children to meet their teacher, although this was not possible for the September 1996 intake when a newly appointed reception class teacher joined the staff as she was not available the previous term when the visits took place.

The co-ordinator saw the visits as helping children to socialise and an opportunity for parents to raise questions. It was recognised that the September intake was disadvantaged as they only had one visit in a large class of children and a lunch, whereas the January and April intakes had two lunch time visits and approximately eight afternoon visits.

The two members of staff (one of whom was the induction co-ordinator) felt that a good induction is crucial for the children to gain insight into the social aspects of school, meet other children and their teacher. However, there were also concerns that

“we ease them in and all of a sudden we have to get them going on the National Curriculum”

One teacher thought that the induction for the January and April intakes was of little use as it caused so much disruption. However, she also felt that children needed to visit to dispel any fears and feel confident to leave their parents.

Both teachers thought that the headteacher’s role in the induction was vital, not only in supporting staff but also in setting the tone and in demonstrating an understanding of the needs of young children to parents. One difficulty from the staff’s point of view was that because they were with their classes, they were not always able to attend all of the induction meeting and did not know what the headteacher had said to parents.

The January 1995 intake caused concern at both schools. At School B staff felt that the induction visits caused the children who were already in the class to suffer because

“the older ones feel put out by these younger ones impinging on their territory. It makes too many children in the class.”

Teachers at both schools see the arrival of the January children as problematic. One teacher at School A said

“It’s difficult when you’ve got one group and the other group joins. There’s not enough time to get to know the new ones. You feel pulled in two directions. You’ve got to give time to the older ones, and a couple of slow ones, and to the new ones. I’m only half a step ahead of them all the time”.

At School B one teacher said

“It took them a while to settle in. Last term’s wouldn’t concentrate. We both had problems with the older ones. It was as if they’d pulled a curtain down on me.”

Both schools formed a new class for the April 1995 intake, although the induction visits were in a different classroom from the one in which the children would be starting. At school B the children were with the September and January intakes for the visits.

#### 4.8.2.1. ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES

I talked with the reception class teachers about alternative strategies for preparing children and school for the start of school. At School A staff

thought that they should be “looking at it again” as they wanted more contact with children before they started. They would also have

“liked them to have done a whole day or a couple of half days so they see the beginning and end of a day. The start of the day is daunting”.

At School B there was concern about parents’ lack of knowledge on how to help their child before school. One teacher said

“I think before they come in they should have a separate meeting about the curriculum. ‘A’ and ‘ay’ could be ironed out. We could tell them about how we do things and why we do it.”

The other said “we need a drop-in clinic early on to talk about handwriting”. Both teachers said that they would like to talk to parents individually before the children start school “to fill in the gaps” and that the school booklet needed to be sent out earlier.

The staff at both schools rejected the idea of children starting on the day of their fifth birthday as it would be “a bit chaotic” and staff would need to be repeating an individual programme of work for each child, which would be difficult for planning. A staggered intake over several hours or days was dismissed with the comment “every hour having three more children - Oh! No!” It was felt that the term after the child’s fifth birthday was preferable as a starting time as they would be “more mature”.

The system of having three intakes a year was regarded as helpful for some children as staff were

“having to repeat the basic things again, which in some ways is a good thing.”

School A has a system of the children attending for mornings only during the first week of term. The staff thought that this was essential although there was the worry that “you do things in the afternoon that they miss out on”. At School B it was thought that some children would have benefited from it “especially the September intake”.

#### **4.8.3. SETTLING IN**

All the reception class teachers, except one, had ‘received’ a reception class before. They prepared their classroom for the first day of term by “ensuring there was plenty of space” having equipment clearly labelled and “name tags on pegs and drawers”.

Children at both schools came with a range of skills from

“readers to non-readers”, steady hand control to “never having put pencil to paper”.

At School A the arrival of the new children was

“a bit chaotic as none of them knew what they were doing”.

The staff started the first day by talking with the children and introducing them to one another. At School B they started with

“lots of talking first thing, some singing and ‘getting to know you’ activities”.

Helping children to feel confident, secure and happy were seen as priorities in the first weeks as well as helping them to understand “what the acceptable modes of behaviour are” usually by repetition and indicating

those who are conforming to the model as well as explaining “this is how we do things in school”. Children are encouraged to become “responsible for themselves” although staff also felt that it was important that children knew that they could ask if they were unsure.

Staff helped children to develop friendships by using their names, introducing them to one another, consciously grouping them in particular ways, pairing at playtime or for responsibilities. One teacher thought that encouraging close friendships too early

“can exclude other children and set up problems”.

Learning to be part of a group was seen as an important part of settling in. Constant repetition helped “to lay the ground rules” and establish routines such as putting up their hand if they wanted to speak, ‘herding’ to and from the hall for assembly, lunch, PE, music and other activities.

Staff at School A who taught a mixed reception and Year One class thought that it was useful for the reception children to have the “older ones to follow”. One teacher at School B lamented that there were “no role models” for the September intake children.

Playtime, lunchtime and assembly were explained beforehand and often discussed afterwards. The children joined in with the rest of the school. Split playtimes in School A helped with the amount of children on the playground but upset those whose older siblings were not on that shift.

Teachers felt that

“it took a good three weeks to get them under control. They couldn’t sit on chairs. Establishing working patterns was the hardest”.

One teacher said that the first three weeks was

“like a honeymoon period. They’re overawed and do exactly as you say, to the letter. But then they start to test you and try the limits”.

Another said that

“after three weeks they didn’t necessarily behave better, they were just more aware of what was expected”.

By half term the children had become “more confident and independent”.

Staff felt the children were beginning to settle when

“they were happy to leave mum and start to make friends and go to each others houses after school”,

and were able to speak to the teacher and were aware of the routines.

#### **4.8.4. CHANGES TO THE INDUCTION PROGRAMME**

No formal evaluation of the induction programme took place either with staff or parents, although both schools mentioned that they sometimes talked about the programme informally with some parents.

There were several changes to the induction programme considered for the academic year 1994/95.

School A:

“I had wondered about them taking a book so they could get used to the system. It could be a useful development and

they could get into the habit of taking maths games. We're revamping the pre-school booklet that identifies activities."

School B:

"I'm working on a pre-school booklet for new children. I'm thinking of having a mum's table of books and maths games that they can look at when they arrive. I'm wondering whether to look at half-time for the first week. If we start back on a Thursday it's quite good but if the start is a full week it's all too much for them."

The co-ordinator was also re-writing the induction policy and working with the LEA on an on-entry profile.

There were some changes made to the induction programmes during 1995 and 1996. School A introduced an on-entry profile which was piloted in the spring of 1995. A new activity and profile booklet was also introduced. A temporary headteacher joined the school for the summer term 1996 who had

"not done induction on this scale before. The teachers wanted to meet the children more so we had a general introduction and included two visits with the teacher. Fifteen minutes the first time and then longer the next time".

At School B a pre-entry profile booklet 'I'm going to School' and the Infant Entry Profile were piloted in the summer of 1996.

Changes to the induction programmes during 1996 and 1997 reflected the philosophy of a new headteacher who was appointed at School A in September 1996. She introduced labels for induction day. A demountable



(‘mobile’ classroom) was used for the visits instead of the main hall as staff found it disruptive with the hall taken out of action during the induction visits. The visits were changed to fewer activity sessions and a lunch time visit. A letter about the reading record and how to use it was given to the parents. From September 1997 horizontal year groups rather than mixed year groups were introduced.

School B introduced a book box for new entrants during the visits. An Infant Entry Profile and interactive booklet were introduced. Children had an afternoon visit with their parents, a morning for an hour with playtime, then a late morning visit which included lunch time.

Staff planned to take photographs of ‘a day at school’ and have them enlarged for the induction visit to give parents an idea of school life. They planned to invite parents to a school lunch during the first month in school. Staff still felt they needed to meet parents on their own and to have an afternoon focused on writing. Consideration was given to introducing an evaluation of the induction after children have been at school for six weeks. A new induction co-ordinator was appointed.

#### ***4.8.5. TRANSITIONS***

School A prepared children for the transition to the next class by

“having a shared story, one afternoon visit and they do things together.”

In September 1996 the children were re-organised into Year 2 classes rather than staying in their mixed Year 1/Year 2 classes for a second year as planned. The staff also changed the year group that they taught as the new head saw this as

“a logical move and good for staff development as the staff were very static”.

School A thought that during 1997/98 they would

“work more closely with the Year 2 to Year 3 move to junior school.”

This might include a letter to parents with the class list in order for them to see the names of the other children in the class. However, the headteacher thought that

“if the information is too early parents will seek to change the class list.”

At School B they

“talked about it [the transition], went and had a look and met their teacher for half an hour. They had a weekly swap to year groups for story to gain a year identity. There was no list on the window this year.”

This last is a reference to the system that the school employed of putting the class-list for the coming year on the window for parents to see. Teachers sent the children on errands in pairs to their next class or to “show work to the teacher” over two or three weeks before the move. Children were also encouraged to return and visit their previous teacher after the move. There were no planned changes to the programme for the foreseeable future.

**DISCUSSION**

Change occurs naturally as the culture of the school changes. It is inter-linked with the development of the school. If the school is not 'emotionally' ready then it might not be able to take ideas on board and develop. Change and growth are not necessarily linear, neither do they start from day one but tend to build on historical issues. Therefore, new staff and parents need an understanding of school myths and traditions to understand why things work or do not work. For example, when School A changed the structure of its classes for Y2, an awareness of change was not created first with parents, which caused some problems as the expectation and tradition was that children stayed in the same class for two years.

This study has demonstrated that change is complex and not necessarily handled in a systematic way as suggested by Everard and Morris (1996, p.333). Rather, it is incremental, developing organically and does not emerge as a 'finished product'. It is emergent (Burnes, 1996) and is a continuous process of experiment and adaptation.

At induction, and particularly transitions, Gardner (1971) highlights the need to raise questions about the best organisation for the children's benefit rather than the school's

"because young children do not protest in ways which no one can fail to understand, it is easy for them to become the victims of people who think it does not really matter whether they . . . have to change their teachers very often, or who will even pause to consider whether this or that form of organisation, however administratively convenient it may

be . . . is really right for them. We need to be constantly asking ourselves not whether young children *can* 'take it' but whether it is the best we can do for their fullest development."

(Gardner 1971, p.3)

### *Summary*

- *School A had an extensive induction programme for all children. The co-ordinator considered it more important for the children to familiarise themselves with the building and contents rather than meeting and getting to know the teacher: The co-ordinator at School B feel that these hold equal weight but had a less extensive programme.*
- *The headteacher's leadership role was seen as central to the induction process. Neither school had a designated 'transitions' co-ordinator.*
- *Teaching staff at both schools found it difficult to assimilate the January intake into the class and keep the older children progressing at a good pace. Visits from the January and April intakes cause disruption at School B and does little for either the visiting children or those already in the class.*
- *The April intake were helped to settle by having a Reception-only or younger age group class.*
- *Three weeks was mentioned by staff as being the length of time that it took children to settle and acclimatise to school.*
- *There were gradual changes to the induction programme at both schools mainly due to new staff.*
- *Both schools prepared children for transition to the next class by talking and visiting. Other transitions such as new children joining the class were talked about with the children who were staying in the class.*
- *Neither school evaluated or monitored their induction programme formally or the transitions that children made through school.*

# **PART FIVE**

## **REFLECTION, SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION**

This study has considered the perceptions of pupils, parents and practitioners in an attempt to identify and illustrate some of the critical features about the induction to school and the transitions that children make as they proceed through Key Stage One (KS1). The analysis suggests that there are similarities and differences in the processes at the two case study schools that reflect the culture of each establishment and the level of importance attached to children's well-being and partnership with parents.

This final section comprises a reflection on the research process; a summary and discussion of the key findings in relation to the aims of the study; an exploration of the theoretical insights and knowledge gained; and implications for practice.

### **5.1. REFLECTION ON RESEARCH PROCESSES**

In this chapter I reflect on some of the aspects of the process of conducting research with regard to the research design, gathering and analysing data and writing, as well as about the social processes of research. Some of this was explored in Chapter 3.5 of the methodology.

**5.1.1. THE PROCESS OF CONDUCTING RESEARCH**

Getting the focus of the research right and being clear about the research design and research questions were important factors at the beginning. It was only later that I realised that the decision-making at this point was crucial to the whole study. Indeed, I did not realise the significance of some of the questions until the final analysis. As Salmon (1992, p.12) points out, the initial questions, which are often developed from existing published work, may pre-empt the outcome and may actually be a world away from questions that need to be asked. Certainly, another time I would have a narrower focus and would attempt to consider questions from other perspectives by conducting some focused, but unstructured, interviews first to see which issues emerged.

The more knowledge that I gained of an area through reading and discussion, the more I began to think that there might be better approaches. However, it was too late to make major changes as I had already started on the chosen route. For example, since conducting the children's interviews I have discussed with a colleague the use of telephones to enable children to develop conversations and might use this method on another occasion. I have also considered using computers to ask children to draw their view or use dolls to capture conversations of children's perceptions. Further work, using computers to help children to express themselves, is planned as a joint venture with some Scandinavian colleagues. On reflection, I might also

have asked parents and staff to keep diaries to gain a better pattern of the interrelationships between spoken perceptions and observations.

People were central to the research. They were open and willing to share their thoughts. However, there were down sides, too. The co-ordinator at one school would only have positive things said. My diary for 7 April 1994 reads

“she is so desperate that nothing should sound negative that she goes totally overboard the other way”

and this affected the way I approached some issues in giving feedback. I wrote on 8 May 1994:

“I’ve written a résumé of findings for \_\_\_\_\_. Needed to be careful as she doesn’t like anything negative.”

I nearly withdrew from this school altogether as I thought that it would affect my research findings. Perhaps it was just my feelings of insecurity about my research because by 19 September 1994 I wrote

“... felt that I was as an equal at last.”

My confidence in my ability to conduct and complete the study sometimes wavered but the participants helped me through and enabled me to see how worthwhile it was, through their enthusiasm for the project. As it proceeded and I published and presented my work I became more confident about discussing it. Others who have helped in this social process have been colleagues, fellow students, tutors and research groups such as the European Early Childhood Research Association (EECERA). At four EECERA conferences (1994-1997) I have taken the opportunity to partake

in symposia where I have been able to present elements of my research and methodology, and to have it questioned by researchers and practitioners.

### **5.1.2. THE PROCESS OF WRITING**

The methodological decision that I made about the style of writing for the findings meant coming to terms with the fact that a radical approach carries potential intolerance. This might be because work not presented in a traditional way may be unacceptable as it has a destabilising effect or that its validity may be questioned. Perhaps I would have been better to present it in a different form but I wanted to make it come alive rather than be dense description. Further, because the information was collected through conversations, communicating the findings through dialogue reflected this approach. My work is also relative in time and culture and I was heartened when I came across the methodological discussions of Miles and Huberman (1994), Wolcott (1994), Dey (1993) and Sparkes (1995), about writing in different genres. At the outset I had not intended writing in this way. Indeed, my research diary reads on 16 March 1996 that one of my supervisors thought that

“my overview of the thesis was too traditional and would like to see it as an action research plan or something modern. I’m not sure that this is the right design but I’ll keep an open mind.”

As the end result demonstrates, not everything I thought would happen, happened. When things turn out differently there are usually unintended consequences and, in this instance, I believe that it has improved my ability to communicate. The development of the use of narrative might also help



others to question their own induction and transition procedures. Another time if I were to write in a similar style I would go further and include asides to the audience to illustrate the on-going analysis.

I also had to come to terms with writing part of the work in the first person because my academic background means that I usually write in the third person. However, as a result of writing in this way, I think I have become more relaxed about writing and it called for me to be explicit about where I stand in relation to the processes and outcomes of the study.

I had concerns about ‘speaking’ for others and using ‘I’ to speak for someone else. I was concerned to capture expression and I consider that creating segments of life histories gave emotional impact to the dialogue.

There were days when my writing just seemed to happen. A state that Csikszentmihalyi (1990, in Goleman 1996, p.90) calls ‘flow’; a state where writing became effortless, where I was utterly absorbed in my work and lost track of time. I was “totally focused, concentrating intently and immersed in the activity” (Pascal and Bertram 1997, p.6). Laevers (1993, p.61) describes this as involvement

“a quality of human activity, intense perceptions and experiencing of meaning, a strong flow of energy, a high degree of satisfaction, and based on the exploratory drive and basic development of schemes.”

On other days I stumbled along. When I first started writing I wrote much of it in long hand before I moved to the computer to 'type it up'. However, in the last year of writing I went straight to the computer and jotted down my ideas, rearranging them into categories and then developing sections. Phillips and Pugh (1987, p 58) describe the work of Lowenthal and Wason (1977) who identified writers as either 'holists' or 'serialists'. I probably I fall somewhere between the two because, although I found that writing led to discovery and I could think as I wrote (holist), I tended to draft a chapter in outline and then return to it later to develop, re-arrange, move or delete segments rather than "compose a succession of complete drafts". The use of a computer spell-check program meant that I could ignore spelling or typing errors and let the ideas flow, whereas in 1977 I suspect that correcting words as they are written (serialist) was due to the lack of a spell-check.

Once I had framed the structure of each section I was able to write and enjoyed writing. I surprised myself with the amount that I was able to write because I usually tend to précis or work in bullet points. This is illustrated by my first piece of writing for this study when my journal reads:

"4.1.94: put together the methodology for survey questionnaire - 2600 words which is quite amazing. I'm pleased that I've managed to write something!"

When I re-wrote this section of the methodology four years later I realised how stilted it was and changed much of it to make it shorter (!) and more

accessible. Even so, I had problems with writing the opening of each and every chapter. I also had difficulties deciding on the tense in which to write.

Deciding which episodes to discuss and where to include them, was sometimes difficult, particularly as many issues overlapped. For example, the disruption that the January intake caused could have been included with behaviour changes and transitions but eventually I included it under ‘incorporation’. Although the main findings were included, it was only when I had finished that I realised that I had not included a section on the first day at school because all the issues had been included elsewhere.

There were important land marks along the way such as ‘discovering’ a particular book or having a conversation over lunch that made a strong and instant impact on my thinking. The opposite was also true, in that some thoughts needed time to mature and I had not realised that I was thinking about them. For example, this can be seen from the earlier illustration about writing styles. I was unsure of the final format of the study but an idea had been planted on 16 March 1996 because by 15 November that year, the idea had germinated without me apparently thinking about it and I wrote in my diary:

“Inspiration came to me about writing in different styles  
according to some of the influences . . . .”

Claxton (1998, pp.13-14), refers to this level of thinking as the “undermind” where “slow ways of thinking” help the individual to gain access to places that are “inaccessible to earnest, purposeful cognition”.

## **5.2. SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF KEY FINDINGS**

This chapter serves to draw together knowledge and understanding gained from my empirical research. Each chapter in Part Four identified the main conclusions concerned with the aspects of that chapter, but many of the issues go across several chapters and, when looked at as a whole, may be seen in a different light. When we begin to explore the perceptions of children, parents and teachers alongside one another, there may be conflicting and contrasting views. I shall discuss significant factors arising from the study by addressing the initial aims.

### **◆ To give a description of the admission policies and induction practices in maintained schools in the locality where the case studies take place:**

The age of starting compulsory education is the term after a child's fifth birthday. However, there are considerable differences in admission policies in schools in the locality which suggests degrees of inequality for pupils in terms of quantity of induction. These range through admitting children on an individual basis, two intakes annually and three intakes annually, but all children start school full time by the age of four years and eight months. Some elements of the LEA policy are offered but, the variation may have implications for the administrative control of the LEA.

One school makes home visits and all schools, except one, offer induction visits for children and their parents before every entry. However, in some cases, those who have control of the induction system are not necessarily those who are working it.

**♦ To inquire why parents choose a particular school for their child:**

Before the induction process even begins, parents decide on a school for their child(ren). Geographical location in relation to home, and concern that the atmosphere is right for their child are the main reasons for parents choosing a particular school. Parents value the social and personal aspects that the school will offer just as much as a reputation for good results. However, a good reputation attracts more children, making the school larger, which may result in a change of ethos. In choosing one school rather than another some pre-school friendship groups are broken.

A market place ideology does not necessarily work to help parents choose a school. Schools might be better marketing their ideals and values to give a wider notion of what their particular school is about and the way in which they see their role in relation to the local community. Equally, parents might require guidance to help them to consider their philosophy so they know what they are looking for and what they want from school.

**◆ To explore the extent to which parents prepare their children for school prior to entry:**

Parents cannot always give their child(ren) a clear picture of the nature of school, although those who already have one or more children at school feel more confident about so doing. However, all the parents talk to their child(ren) about going to school. Some parents do not always recognise the learning that has already taken place and want to prepare their children for school education by teaching the alphabet and letter formation. However, they are concerned to be doing it 'right' and many parents feel inadequate in their ability to prepare their children for 'school' learning. They know about the school uniform, lunch boxes and other 'visible' signs of starting school but want information about what to teach their child.

Social confidence is seen as important by parents and they feel that this is gained through their child(ren) attending a pre-school setting.

**◆ To look into parents' expectations as their child starts school:**

Parents want their children to be happy at school and make friends but are anxious about unknown experiences. One such occasion is lunch time and parents want their child(ren) to have a lunch time experience before the start of school.

Some parents are also concerned that their children might be bullied at school, or be a bully. The personality of their child's first teacher is important. Parents want a teacher whom their child likes and who appreciates their child's individuality while helping their child to behave and achieve their potential. Many of these attributes might contribute to children's well-being.

**◆ To gain an understanding of children's perception of school before they begin statutory education:**

Before starting school most children say they are looking forward to going even though they are unclear about its physical aspects, what it entails or the role of the teacher. They see school in terms of lunch boxes and uniforms rather than learning and many children rehearse trying on their uniform. Some children worry that they will not know anyone when they start. Those with older siblings already at school sometimes play at 'schools'. They have a better understanding of the nature of school through listening to their older siblings or seeing school items, such as books, which they bring home.

Many children view the start of school as the time when the afternoon visits start rather than from the time they are registered, particularly those who have several visits before starting. During this time children are presented

with activities such as role play, drawing, painting and construction toys to give them a 'taste' of school. Although they will come across these when they start, they will also have a much broader curriculum and therefore may gain the wrong impression of school at this juncture.

The visits do not necessarily help children to understand the nature of school because children do not experience it in terms of curriculum, length of day, or their peer group. Children may think that school education is normally part-time if they have too many short visits that they view as 'going to school'.

**◆ To investigate the admission policies and the way in which induction practices are managed:**

Nearly half the parents did not know the compulsory school starting age but wanted their children to start school as soon as possible. They relied on the school to tell them when that was but were confused if they were offered a place in two different schools.

Many parents of the September intake do not realise that their children have longer in school than their peers born later in the academic year. Parents of children starting school in the summer are pleased that their children start in a separate class with a peer group of a similar age, rather than with children who have been in school for some time.



Parents want their children to be in the same class as their friends when they first start school but friendship groups are sometimes broken if children go into different classes. Frustrations are also caused if children start school a term before their friend(s). Children feel more secure if they start school with a friend.

Termly admission causes disruption to the class and staff feel that they are torn between 'new' and 'old' children. This is also the case during pre-start visits if children visit an existing class. For the January intake, not only does the teacher have insufficient time to introduce the children to the routines and culture of the class, resulting in the children taking longer to settle, but it is also disrupting for the autumn intake who are just beginning to settle. Admission policies may, therefore, disadvantage some children's start at school and affect their ability to become part of a group.

Most parents want to meet their child's teacher, see the school and gain information about their child's forthcoming formal education during the visits. If parents know what to expect they may feel more confident and secure. Schools want to familiarise parents on pre-entry visits not only with the school accommodation, but also with their curriculum approach to reading, thereby developing procedures that encourage partnership and trust in the school to which they are sharing the responsibility for the child's education. However, parents are given large amounts of information at the

first meeting and some find it difficult to remember or assimilate it. Staff, too, want information as they want to know what was said to parents during these meetings and to meet the children and their parents.

There are some misunderstandings on the part of some children about the roles of adults at school. For example, the arrangement for visits at one school is that the headteacher takes the role of teacher, partly because she wants get to know the children, but in effect she is causing confusion as the children think that she is their teacher. Children's understanding is also hindered if the visits take place in one room but they begin school in another. Some activities and experiences are offered which are not typical of school and may be misleading as a result.

Pre-entry profiles are not always explained clearly. Some parents question whether they are answered honestly, some experience guilt feelings if they are not completed, some perceive that it is they who are being put under scrutiny and others think that teachers will ignore the profiles altogether. Indeed, teachers tend not to look at them. However, parents may be able to help the school identify what their children have learned and how they learned it. Pre-entry profiles might also be used to help parents to see how their children approach an activity as well as seeing outcomes. Knowing the ways in which children respond and behave towards an activity might also be useful to teachers when children start school.

In classes where there are older children the teacher encourages them to initiate the new children into the classroom systems and acquire the classroom culture. Although teachers appreciate having children of one age-group start together, they find the lack of older role models a disadvantage. They perceive that children starting in a class with older ones helps the children to settle. It might also be that they provide a higher level of language.

**◆ To find out how children make sense of school:**

Children are happier and more confident if they take something from the home environment with them and once they have formed friendships. Parents also see their children being with pre-school friends as significant in helping them to settle. This suggests that the social process helps children to adapt to new situations but also that children's social skills help them adapt to their new social groups.

Children learn the classroom routines and culture through observing others, asking their friends, listening to or asking the teacher. In those classes with older children the teacher asks children to look after the younger ones. Children might like the security of older ones looking after them but this might also be daunting.

There are some confusions about status. When children are visiting they are 'being a visitor' and have status because of the special nature of visitors. When they start school they change status and become a school child which is often accompanied by an increase in confidence. However, they lose their special status when the next set of children start visiting during their first term. Other confusions are about size. Before starting school they are told they are 'big' but when they begin school they are 'one of the little ones'.

If children are joining an established class they might be unaware of the status and hierarchy of pupils in the class that they are entering. Indeed, they may not know that they are joining a group of children who have been at school for some time.

By the end of the reception year some children are unaware of the role of adults in school other than their teacher.

**♦ To investigate parents' perceptions of the start of school:**

Most parents consider that their child adjusts to school within the first few days or weeks at school and that this is helped by the induction programme. Where access to school is encouraged, parents act as a transitional link between microsystems. Parents appreciate their child(ren) attending school

for half-days at the beginning of term, although this causes some disruption to their lives.

Most children take between three and six weeks to settle into school, with some settling from the first day. Although some parents are surprised at how quickly their children settle, they are unprepared for their children becoming unsettled later if this happens. This might be an indicator that the child started school too early or that something was lacking in the induction. For a few parents it is on reflection, at the end of Y2, that they realise that their child took longer to settle than they had at first realised. Sometimes it is not until their child has moved classes the following term or year that they become aware of earlier problems.

There are several demands on parents when their child first begins school, not least because of the changes to the balance of family life and feelings of loss that parents experience. Some no longer feel in control of the cultural influence and level of involvement that they have with their child. They are also learning the 'language' of school and learning about the school system and curriculum.

Most parents of summer-born children are unconcerned about their child having only one term in the reception class. They are more concerned about continuity of teacher and friendships.

Parents are surprised when major changes occur in their child's behaviour at home during the first few weeks of school.

Once children begin school, most parents want to gain information about their child, have sufficient access to the school and be given a wide variety of opportunities to understand their child's work and progress. Many parents' knowledge of the curriculum is limited as some children tend not to tell parents the detail of what they do at school. An explanation might be that children do not want to explain what they have been doing because they do not want to re-live their day; or because they want to keep their school world private and separate from their home world; or they may not be able to explain their day because it stretches their linguistic powers; or they lack skills in sequencing events and putting things into focus; or perhaps they are not used to school words like 'lesson' or 'class' or 'subject'; or they may experience the day in a predominantly affective way and cannot explain their feelings. It might be a combination of these.

Parents also glean information from looking at exercise books if they have access to the classroom, through their child's 'reading diary' and by talking with other parents. Some do not understand what they see and want further information. Most feel they know about progress in reading (through the reading diary) but not about other areas of the curriculum. They want to know of any problems that arise in order to help by supporting their child at home.

**◆ To gain an understanding of participants' notions of partnership and its significance during the start of school and during transitions:**

There is limited contact between schools and pre-school settings and no contact with individual child minders. Thus, there are lost opportunities for partnership.

There is a lack of clarity over what constitutes a good home-school partnership and an assumption that the school will lead and dictate the partnership.

Most parents would welcome an early partnership long before the start of school as they want information about ways to help their children. Although forced learning might be ill-advised, by not encouraging an early partnership between home and school, opportunities may be missed for developing children's early learning and parents' life-long learning. The majority of parents would welcome home visits prior to their children starting school but recognise the cost implications in terms of time, training and supply cover.

From the time that their children start school, parents expect to be kept informed about whether or not their child is progressing normally and about their child's state of well-being. Parents appreciate the close partnership that develops with the Reception class teacher but most want privacy to

discuss their child when talking to the teacher at the beginning or end of the day. The building plays a significant part in the way that partnership is viewed by parents in that the open-plan building sees many parents thinking that partnership is more open.

Most parents want information about each transition for their own peace of mind and to be able to talk to their child about the move from an informed base. However, far from increasing, information exchange reduces as children progress through school, with the parents' role becoming supportive rather than active. This brings renewed feelings of uncertainty for many parents for, although they have put their trust in the school, most still want guidance on ways in which to support their child at home. However, parents also feel that, as their child gains in independence, they can reduce their involvement with the school. As a result, the nature of the partnership with school changes.

**♦ To gain an insight into children's and their parents' perceptions of continuity and discontinuity as children make each transition through KS1:**

There is confusion over the 'route' through school for some children and their parents. For some the transitions are seen as an annual upheaval, for others they are a necessity that must be endured. For a few they are a relief and a promise of a new beginning.



Anxiety is likely to be created at the beginning of term if parents do not know where to take their children or if they have no knowledge of the expected system. Most parents want clear communication and preparation for themselves as well as their children at each transition. If parents have sufficient information they feel able to ease the transitions for their child and family. Friends and older siblings also help in the information process about transitions.

Most parents consider that continuity of environment, teacher and friends between age-stages help to create stability. However, transition causes disruption to some friendship pairs and groups. This is not always a disadvantage as sometimes new relationships form as a result. Most parents think that a high level of social confidence in their children helps to make the transition an easier one.

For most parents the transition from KS1 to KS2 is a major transition, although this is not necessarily the case for their children. One would suppose that this transition would be somewhat easier in a primary school. However, the nature of the building plays a part and if the building is separate, as it is in School B, then it is seen as a big step to KS2. If an induction to KS2 is provided for children and their parents this is perceived as beneficial. When children first start school most of them do not consider the preliminary visits as a preparation for school, yet they are very clear at

the transition to KS2 that the visits are preparatory to entering a new stage of school. Most parents and children at both schools will miss the contact with the KS1 setting.

**♦ To ascertain how schools evaluate their induction programmes and develop changes to their induction and transition systems over a three year period:**

Neither school has a formal system of evaluating their induction programme or the way in which transitions are managed. However, incremental and dynamic changes occurred to the induction programmes during 1994-1997. Some of these occurred due to changes of staff and some came about due to the research focus. Discontinuity may occur, with its possible resulting anxiety and stress, unless the induction and transitions are carefully managed and children feel secure in the changes that they encounter.

**♦ To consider ways of helping practitioners to question their induction and transition procedures:**

“ . . . the role of educational research is to inform professional discourse, and to be informed by it. Research should contribute to the maelstrom of ideas, theories, facts and judgements about education. It should be something that teachers and policy-makers look for, read about, argue over, reflect on, and then either reject and forget, or file away in their memory to adapt and adopt later. But here is

the rub - most research writing is not memorable and not much of it is easy to get hold of.”

“So the question arises: how can research contribute to professional discourse in such a way that it is readily understood and remembered?”

(Bassey 1998, p.20)

How is my research to be communicated to teachers? My final aim is to consider ways of helping practitioners to question their induction and transition procedures and open up cracks in habitual traditions. What will happen to my research? One way forward might be to use some of the illustrative scenes to inform others and develop practice by helping practitioners to understand and question their own practice. Just as Bruner (1996a, p.39) suggests narrative for children to “create a version of the world in which, psychologically, they can envisage a place for themselves” then the same may also be true for adults.

In an attempt to help practitioners think about their systems of preliminary visits to school I made a tentative move with using narrative in March 1998. As part of a part-time In-service degree in Early Years Education two groups of students were exploring issues about the start of school. The students were asked to consider practice from a parent’s point of view by reflecting on the telephone conversation between ‘Lorraine and Debbie’ in Chapter 4.4.2. This recounts the tale of the first visit to school. One group read and discussed the conversation and the other acted it as a role play situation. A lively discussion ensued in which a number of students identified factors that they might want to reconsider in their own practice.

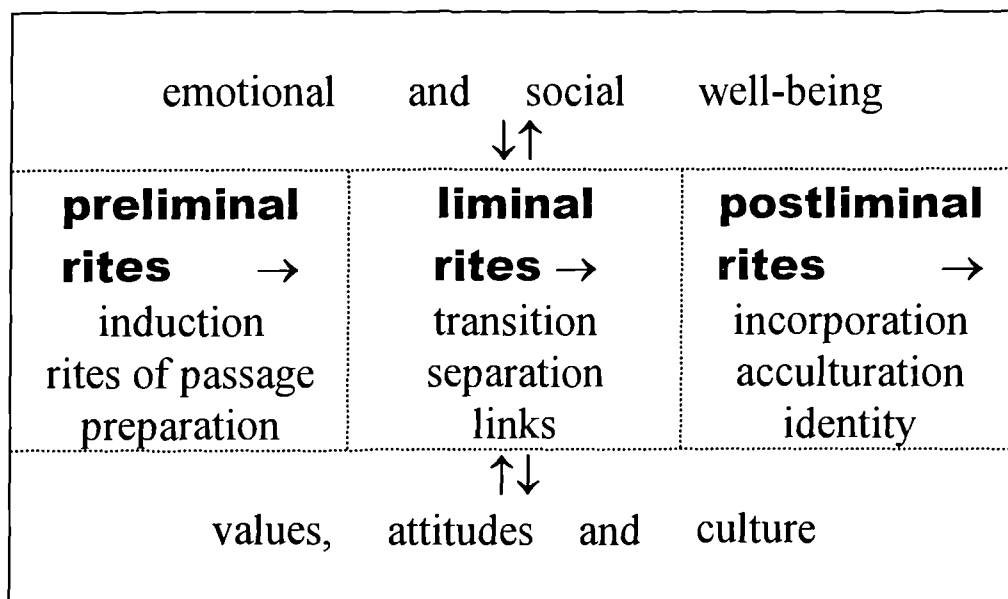
The students were later asked to complete a questionnaire (see Appendix 12) about the accessibility of the information. There were twenty four returns from a possible thirty. Initial analysis of the questionnaires indicates that it was easier to access as role play than through reading it as narrative. Nonetheless, respondents thought that both styles gave meaning to the subject and made it easy to understand the issues. Further analysis on the way in which my research in this format has had an impact on practice is planned and will be presented at the In-Service and Professional Development Association (IPDA) conference in October 1998.

Some articles resulting from my research have been published and these can be found in Appendix 13. One way in which practitioners and parents may be able to support children's understanding about the start of school and transitions is through stories. I may, as a result, attempt to write a story for children about the induction to school.

### 5.3. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL REFLECTION

This chapter takes some of the information gained from the study and, with some further analysis, looks at the implications and attempts to make some possible generalisations.

The theoretical framework (Part Two) explored the notion of sociological and psychological disciplines which were informed by the work of van Gennep (1960), Vygotsky (1978), Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Laevers (1997). From these came the disciplines of social anthropology, experiential constructs and socio-cultural cognition, resulting in the following conceptual framework:



Most of the research findings can be assimilated into the categories and sequences of this framework. They are now explored further through the concepts of rites of passage, emotional and social well-being and of cultural values.

**5.3.1. RITUALS AND CEREMONIES**

Van Gennep (1960) discussed Rites of Passage which mark a change of status. In my research I found that there were certain rites of passage that children and parents undergo during the pre-liminal, liminal and post liminal stages of induction and transitions.

The Pre-liminal stage, leading to the start of school, is often marked by the rite of passage where items of school uniform are purchased. The night before the first day at school, children and their parents then prepare the uniform for the next day. This leads to the change of status to school child.

At the liminal stage there are various physical rites during the visits to school, such as entering school and seeing the environment for the first time. There is the social rite of the first meeting with the teacher. Before a transition, children visit their next class and teacher and say goodbye to the present one.

Post-liminal rites on the first day of school are marked by children wearing their school uniform for the first time. For some children there is an entrance ceremony of having their photograph taken as they enter school. Social rites include children being introduced to classmates, gaining the identity of being a school child, the 'naming ceremony' of the register and therefore of being part of that class. For parents, there is the initial separation from their child and meeting them again at the end of the first

day. If children come together from diverse groups during transitions, there are social rites of introductions and a creation of a new class equilibrium.

Further research about the ceremonies that mark the beginning and end of a year may identify the common features of these times for children, parents and practitioners.

### ***5.3.2. FRIENDS, FAMILY AND SCHOOL***

My conceptual framework identified that emotional and social well-being are vital in the process of enabling children to settle into school. This is based on the work of Vygotsky (1978), Bronfenbrenner (1979), Bruner (1996a) and Laevers (1997). My research also highlighted the emotional well-being of parents in this process because an emotional cycle was evident, in that, if the child was unhappy the parents were also unsettled.

Laevers (1997, p.5) states that if children lack well-being, their development may be threatened. If, on the other hand, children have high self-esteem and are secure they are likely to face new challenges happily. Teachers want the induction to school to be pleasant and to ease children into their classes as quickly as possible, creating a seamless web between settings, and thus reducing emotional disharmony.

Schools might want to question further the purpose of the preliminary visits that they offer to children and parents. Is it to give children an idea about

the excitement of learning? Is it to give them an understanding of what it means to be at school? Do schools want to give children similar experiences during these visits to those that they meet at pre-school or do they want to convey that school might be different? What message do parents receive?

Schools may also want to question the format that the visits take and whether the induction itself inhibits the transition. Is the expectation and excitement of starting school removed in the frustration of short visits and 'dabbling toes' rather than jumping straight in? Are elaborate induction procedures necessary? What helps in the long term? It is the quality of preliminary visits rather than the quantity that is important.

If schools are to have visits, then getting them right is important for the child's emotional well-being. The way in which they are conducted is critical. Some systems might be misleading or unhelpful. High quality experiences in a calm atmosphere with opportunities to see what school is about, are more likely to be successful than overcrowded visits where the teacher feels flustered.

How are children helped to cope with the emotional and social challenges they meet? One approach may be that the induction visits are more like a school day in content and the people that children meet. Another may be that induction visits are timed nearer to the start of school. Schools might help children to gain a feel of the length of a school day by gradually



increasing the length of the visits to include aspects such as play time, lunch time and assembly.

Bruner (1996a) highlights the use of story to resolve the unexpected for children and as a vehicle for meaning making. Teachers telling the children stories about school and of teacher expectations, or children watching a video about school, might give them an indication of the nature of school and its culture. Children might be helped to make sense of transitions through stories that link past and present experiences. One way of informing children about school before they begin might be by having a school-room equivalent of a doll's house. A question for further research might be to explore whether the children's prior knowledge of the classroom affects their subsequent behaviour and development in the new setting.

The pressure of the unfamiliar might be helped by having someone to watch and thereby make it familiar. Children might gain from observing children at school to see what happens, watching the way children behave at school and thereby possibly gain some understanding of school culture. However, Bruner (1996a) suggests that the culture is learned by taking part in it and it was evident from my research that most children gained some understanding of school as a result of their preliminary visits. The culture may also be absorbed without conscious thought through 'osmosis' but the process cannot be hurried (Claxton 1998, p.68).

In the conceptual framework, cultural exchange was identified as a two-way process. If children were to tell stories of themselves, teachers might also get an insight into the children's culture.

Some teachers 'pair' children with older children at the start of school to help them learn about school, give them emotional support and thereby, gain knowledge in their Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978). Further research might identify children's feelings and the possible benefits of this system.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggests that the developmental potential of a setting is enhanced if the child's initial transition into that setting is in the company of one or more people from a previous setting or with people who have had experience of both settings. Therefore it is likely that the parent(s) staying with the child during the preliminary visits will help in this respect. A photograph or an object from home might also act as an emotional support. During the change and uncertainty of transitions, transferring with a friend might offer this continuity and security. Schools which have mechanisms for linking social relationships across transitions may help adaptation. As Hartup (1991) states

"friends set the emotional stage for exploring one's surroundings".

This is not to suggest that there is only one system of induction and transition, for it might be different for each child, and rather than one common way, might take a variety of forms in practice.

It is likely that anxiety is reduced during transitions if levels of social and emotional well-being are high. This might come about by helping children and their parents learn the culture of school and through supportive friendships. However, these are insufficient on their own as an appropriate flow of information, as we shall see in the next section, has the potential to reduce stress further.

### **5.3.3. COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION**

My research found that parents want information during induction and before transitions, and if there is insufficient it leads to parents' emotional disharmony and, in turn, affects their child's ability to 'settle'. However, too much information or misinformation is also likely to hinder transitions and cause anxiety. Transitions are likely to be improved, therefore, by the appropriate quantity and content of information flow to parents and their children. Consequently, the importance of communication is reflected in an amended conceptual framework, and recognises the two-way directional flow of information between home and school:

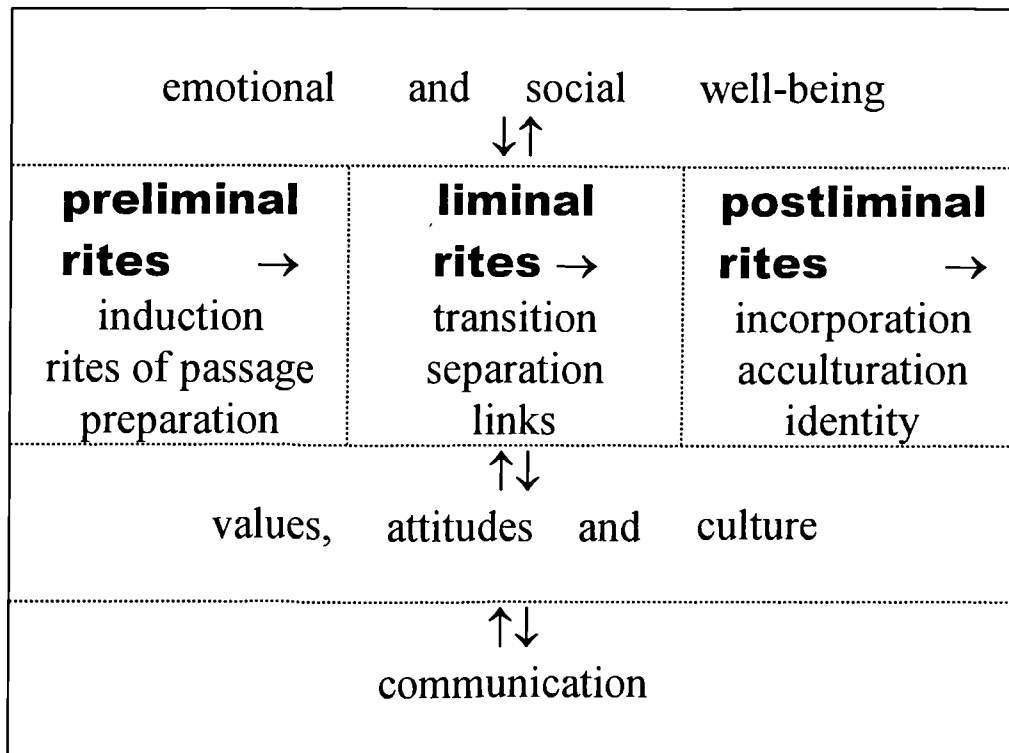


Figure 5. An Amended Conceptual Framework

This two-way flow of information may be seen in several ways. Vygotsky (1978) states that learning takes place through interaction with more competent others. Induction is not necessarily a one way process. A working knowledge of each other is advisable if children are to benefit fully. At the start of school, parents have a vast knowledge and understanding about their child. If teachers are to build on this, then working in partnership with parents, getting to know each family and viewing parents as supporters of learning, might give continuity to children's education.

Parents also want to know about school and its systems. Information given during induction visits, that is accessible both in quality and quantity, may help parents in their understanding, give them confidence and reduce anxiety. An induction curriculum for parents in which they are given explanations to help them understand the nature of learning and social practices at school, might enable them to take a greater role in preparing their children before they begin full time education. One way of helping parents to understand the way in which classrooms function might be by Bruner's (1996a) notion of learning through stories, perhaps in the form of video, pamphlets or photographs. Another way might be to invite parents to watch a class 'in action'. Information at transitions would also help to allay anxieties.

Many parents want school to be a shared enterprise between parents and school (Bastiani, 1995). A sharing of information about expectations of partnership, prior to the start of school, might clarify and guide its development. One way might be to give parents an induction into the possible levels of involvement. Another might be through parent conferences where they can begin to evolve the nature of the partnership. If education is to be seen as part of a continuum, the working links made with parents in the reception class should ideally be sustained through each transition.

Once children have started school, parents' access to information is often through access to the building. However, the installation of alarm systems is reducing access, and as a result might be reducing information and partnership.

My research found that a lack of clear ideas of partnership, both by parents and schools, leads to its demise after the initial induction. An understanding of the partnership, particularly at transitional times, might help it to flourish. The implications of this for schools are:

- early liaison with home, well before school starts;
- effective two-way communications during induction and transitions;
- finding ways in which parents may support learning;
- giving parents access to school and teachers;
- parental involvement in the evaluation of the induction and transitions;
- a focused review of partnership at each stage of transfer.

Monitoring and evaluation of schools' induction and transition systems may improve their design and policy. However, the success of this will depend on the schools' internal organisation. It cannot be assumed that all schools are at the same level of development, but setting targets for improvements in the home-school partnership may improve the induction and transitions for children.

**5.3.4. A WIDER VIEW**

Throughout life people make transitions involving social experiences which affect their psychological functioning and personal development (Rutter and Rutter 1992, p.356). Children have to cope with a number of changes and increasing discontinuities in their lives caused by psychological variables such as

“parental separation, divorce and remarriage, disease or death of a family member, migration or mobility induced by job”

(Fthenakis 1998, p.10)

They will also have to cope with rapid change in other areas of life such as those introduced by technology. Thus, transitions are not just regulated by age-related stages, where children transfer from pre-school to school or year group to year group, but also by “phases of intensified and accelerated development which are socially regulated” (Fthenakis, 1998, p.13) and constituted by psychological changes. They involve children coping with emotional turmoil and a reorganisation of their identity and status.

The reorganisation of status might be helped by attendant rites of passage, the function of which is to

“enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally well defined”

(van Gennep 1960, p.3).

The social processes of these may act as a support for individuals as their behaviour is modified through the passage of crossing the boundaries from one status to another.

Substantial change can “induce psychological changes” (Fthenakis 1998, p.11). The issue for children is how they will cope with changes, discontinuities and all levels of transition throughout life, in a world that changes rapidly and becomes increasingly changed. Many people enjoy change and adapt easily to transitions but the results of research by Fthenakis and Textor (1998), indicate that there is a need to teach children to cope with transitions by teaching competences of resilience.

Transitions do not just affect the individual but those connected with them. Parents, too, experience a transition as their child starts school and may experience emotional turmoil at this time. Further research might indicate whether the coping strategies are the same for adults as children. The issues for parents about transitions include the need for shared information and concern for their child’s well-being. The issues for schools about transitions are:

- the level of communication with parents, including access to the classroom and teacher;
- the climate of openness towards parents;
- the degree of priority and concomitant finance and time allocated to induction and transition, including liaison with pre-school groups.

My research suggests that the quality and quantity of communication is critical to harmony, both before and during transitions and that certain social processes help. These include:



- preparation for transitions through gaining information about the transition process itself and the practical details that might be encountered;
- each learning about the other;
- using stories as a safe way to elucidate the transition;
- learning behaviours and systems by watching others;
- making the transition with a friend;
- talking with those who have experienced a similar transition.

Those who settle quickly into school may have gained strategies of self-help by using some of the above techniques. They have been scaffolded through their transition and can recognise their own adaptation. As a result they may use some of these strategies in the future. Those who are not helped may have few strategies for self-help and may find transitions in the future difficult. The building of self-help strategies have increasing importance for young citizens in a fast changing world.

The transition to school is likely to set the pattern for other transitions, for “early experiences tend to determine later experiences.” (Rutter and Rutter 1992, p.33). If the coping strategies required for the start of school are similar to those for other transitions, then it makes sense that competences for coping gained during this transition are maximised. The major factor in optimising these competences is the quality and quantity of communication.

## 5.4. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

We live in a society where there is rapid social change, the pace of change is constantly accelerating (Kerry, 1998) and where “the future is not what it used to be” (Dencik, 1997). Therefore, we need to look at what induction and transition might mean in a world of increasing technological changes where schools may be virtual classrooms. Alexander (1998, p.123) suggests that school might be a number of “local learning resource centres” that are a focus for family learning. Other possibilities are home-based education (Meighan, 1997) or “flexi-schooling” (Meighan, 1988) where school becomes one of many resources

“to be used when the child and parent choose, according to a contract between them and the school.”

(Meighan 1997, p.56)

If, as Meighan (1997) and others (see Richards and Taylor, 1998) suggest, school might be a flexible phenomenon, then induction would not just be a feature of the reception class but of several stages throughout a child’s education as each new phase or element might need a separate induction. Perhaps a mentor might act as guide for a group of children who use a variety of resource centres and might be instrumental in bridging the microsystems. This has implications for mentor training.

If schools take the same format that they do today, how might induction be assisted by Information and Communications Technology? In adapting systems to the needs of children and their parents this might mean using e-mail as a home-school link before the start of, and during, school, to

contribute to learning and knowledge of school. Internet, CD-ROM or video may inform parents and children about school and give an indication of school and its culture. The use of an interactive CD-ROM might create a virtual classroom where children can experience school before they arrive, 'meet' their teacher and see his/her teaching style, and even see their proposed 'route' through school.

Once children are in school, a camera in the classroom linked to the Internet would enable parents to see their child and the class in action. This would both give parents information about learning and their child's well-being.

Since I started this research, the school starting age has, in effect, been lowered through a change in funding policy caused by the introduction of the Nursery Education Voucher Scheme and, latterly, the Nursery Education Grant. What difference might this make to the induction to school in the future? Thomson (1998, p.8) talks about changes to starting school at aged six and school's minister Estelle Morris admitted that there may be "more sophisticated and open methods" (Morris, 1998) of preparing children to become learners. It is likely that the younger the child the more support may be required to enable them to become incorporated into school life.

This study has explored induction to the reception class at the beginning of a term. However, some families move after the start of term and after their child has been attending another school for some time. As a result, children will be entering school after the term has begun and may not be able to visit beforehand. Further research may identify policies and practice designed to help families whose children do not start at beginning of school year. Further research may also identify differences in induction and transitions in small schools or those with several hundred pupils.

## 5.5. ENDINGS AND BEGINNINGS

Life stages and the transitions within them are an inevitable, continuing and changing social activity. Clearly, transitions are not always of equal importance or equally elaborated. It is also clear that the levels of communication, information and socio-emotional support are crucial during each transition. Potential discontinuities and stress may be eliminated or minimised for children and their parents through sensitive management in which an environment is created where all children can develop confidence to learn.

“Our human past is encoded symbolically in rituals, conventions, rules, myths, legends, personal narratives, literature and bodies of knowledge. Each generation of a society or culture, in turn, takes from and transforms history, achieving in the process continuity, progression and change.”

(Gura 1996, p.38)

The history that is discussed and shared in this study may help to inform future generations and play a part in making sense of the process of children's induction to school and transitions through school, and in the changes that may take place as a result. Thus, although the traditions, attendant practices, beliefs and expectations of the induction and transitions at each school may be rooted in the past they can be evaluated and re-shaped in the present, for the smooth induction of children in the future.

“My first day at school today.  
    Funny sort of day.  
    Didn’t seem to learn much,  
    Seemed all we did was play.  
Then teacher wrote some letters  
    On a board all painted black,  
And then we had a story and . . .  
    I don’t think I’ll go back.”

(Carl and Sensier 1994, p.26)

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# **APPENDICES**

**TO:**

**INDUCTION TO SCHOOL AND  
TRANSITIONS THROUGH KEY  
STAGE ONE: PRACTICE AND  
PERCEPTIONS**

**HILARY FABIAN**

**JULY 1998**

**APPENDIX 1****QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SCHOOLS**

**Questions for the headteacher: Please circle or complete as appropriate.**

**ADMISSION PRACTICE:****THE SCHOOL:**

1. What is the type of school?:

Infant school with nursery  
Infant school without nursery  
Primary with nursery  
Primary without nursery

2. Full time number on roll?

**POLICY:**

3. Do you have a written Admissions Policy?                      YES                      NO

4. Do you have a written induction policy?                      YES                      NO

5. Who has management responsibility for the induction of new children?

Headteacher  
Deputy Headteacher  
Reception class teacher(s)  
Other (Please specify)

6. How do you organise your intake of new children? e.g. How many full time/part time intakes? When do they start?

7 What are your reasons for starting the children at the times you do?

8. Would you consider an annual admissions system?

YES                      NO                      PERHAPS

9. Do you actively "market" your school?

YES                      NO                      A LITTLE

10. Are parents invited to school as a group before their child starts school?

YES                      NO

If YES. What type of pre-admission activities do you have? e.g. visits by parents, parents and children, and by children?

11. What do you see as the main aims of these visits?

12. Do the visits take the same format each term? YES NO  
If NO. In what way do they differ?

13. Are parents asked to complete a pre-school profile? YES NO

14. Do you have a booklet for parents specifically about starting school?  
YES NO

#### SEPTEMBER 1994 INTAKE

15. How many classes were the new children divided between?  
1 2 3 4 5 more than 5, please specify.

16. What is the type of organisation in the class which they entered?  
YR  
YR and Y1  
YR, Y1 and Y2  
Other, please specify

#### PRE-SCHOOL SETTINGS:

17. What type of pre-school facilities are there in the locality?  
Playgroup  
Nursery  
Kindergarten  
Mums & Toddlers  
Play-school  
Under Five's Group  
Other, please specify

18. Does the school have contact with any of them? YES NO  
If YES, what form does this take?



**Questions for the teacher of reception class children: Please circle or complete as appropriate.**

1. What sort of training did you have?

Nursery  
Nursery/Infant  
Infant  
Junior  
Infant/Junior  
Secondary  
Other, please specify

2. How many years have you been teaching?

Under 3  
3 - 6  
7 - 10  
Over 10.

3. How many times have you 'received' a reception class?  
(This might include two or three intakes during one year.)

4. Of what importance is the induction process for you, the children and the parents?

**BEFORE THE CHILDREN BEGIN SCHOOL:**

5. Before the children start school do you make home visits?

YES  
NO

6. Do the children visit the classroom before they start school?

YES  
NO

If YES, what are your main priorities for the visits?

7. Do you have an entry profile system?

YES  
NO

THE FIRST FEW DAYS IN SEPTEMBER 1994:

8. Did all the new children start school on the same day? YES  
NO
9. Did all the new children start at the same time? YES  
NO
10. If you had a staggered intake how did this affect your teaching style?
11. What was the procedure for children coming into school on their first day?
12. Were parents invited to stay in the classroom on their child's first day at school? YES  
NO
13. What did you plan for your initial meeting with your new children on their first day at school?
14. Briefly describe a typical sequence of activities for a child's first day at school.
15. How did you help the children to get to know one another?

16. Did the new children have playtime with the rest of the school?

YES

NO

17. How were routines and activities introduced? e.g. PE, assembly, play time, lunch time, end of day?

18. How are parents encouraged to continue their partnership with the school?

19. If you could make some changes to the induction to improve it in some way, what would you like?

#### THE ROLE OF OTHER ADULTS:

20. Do you have any ancillary help? e.g. NNEB, ancillary parent helper?

YES

NO

If YES, during the first four days of the September intake starting, did you have:

more help

less help

the same amount of help

21. What was the role of these other adults during the first few days of the new children starting?

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. It explores some of the issues that I am pursuing and your responses are valued. If there are any further matters regarding the admission and induction of children into school that you would like to comment on, please use the space below to express your views.

## APPENDIX 2a

### LETTER TO ACCOMPANY QUESTIONNAIRE

7th November 1994

Dear Headteacher,

The attached questionnaire, concerned with new children starting school, is part of a study that I am carrying out in the Shrewsbury area. This project is exploring the admission and induction of children into statutory schooling and includes case studies in some schools in Shrewsbury. I hope the results will be useful.

I particularly need your response, and that of your reception class teacher(s), because your experiences will contribute significantly towards giving a wide view of this important area of education. It won't take more than 10 minutes to complete.

It would be appreciated if you and your reception class teacher(s) would complete the enclosed forms by November 25th and return them in the stamped addressed envelope provided. Your responses will be held in the strictest confidence.

I will be pleased to send you a summary of the questionnaire results if you wish. Thank you for your co-operation.

Yours sincerely

Hilary Fabian

**APPENDIX 2b**

**LETTER TO ACCOMPANY FOLLOW-UP  
QUESTIONNAIRE**

11th December 1994

Dear Headteacher,

I hope that you will be able to find 10 minutes in the busy run up to Christmas, or early in the new year, to complete the enclosed questionnaire concerned with the admission and induction of new children into school.

Already 50% of schools have responded to this survey and it would be helpful to have even more responses to build an overall picture of the transition of children into school.

I would appreciate it if you and your reception class teacher(s) would complete the enclosed forms by Friday January 6th and return them in the stamped addressed envelope provided. Your responses will be held in the strictest confidence.

I will be pleased to send you a summary of the questionnaire results if you wish.

Thank you for your co-operation.

Yours sincerely

Hilary Fabian

## APPENDIX 3a

## LETTER TO PARENTS OF AUTUMN 1994 INTAKE

Dear

Starting school is a critical and exciting period in your child's life. It makes a lot of demands, some social, some physical and some academic. It also makes demands on you. We are all concerned to make this a happy and beneficial time for you and your child.

I am a lecturer in Early Years education at the Crewe and Alsager Faculty of The Manchester Metropolitan University. As part of a study into the transition that children make to school, your child's school and I are working together on a research project designed to add to our understanding of the experience of this transition. It is hoped that from the research some clear ideas will emerge that could help make the transition even better for children. For this to happen we need you and your child's views as well as the teacher's.

We particularly need your support in this because your experience will contribute significantly towards informing us of the joys, difficulties and hopes that parents may face during this important time for you and your child. Your child and you have been randomly selected from the group of children starting school in September 1994. The sample includes boys and girls, those who have brothers and sisters at school, and those who have not.

I would like to talk to you about your expectations, hopes and anxieties before you and your child attend the introductory sessions at school, and again shortly after your child has started at school. This would last about an half an hour each time. I would also like to talk to your child for about a quarter of an hour, with you present, in order to discover his/her thoughts and ideas about starting school. These interviews can take place at school or in your own home, as you wish.

As the research develops you will be kept up-to-date by newsletter. We hope that you will be able to help in this important research. If you would like to take part please complete the slip below and return it by

Yours sincerely

-----

### STARTING SCHOOL RESEARCH

Please delete where applicable:

- I would/would not like to take part in the research which is exploring the transition and induction of children into school.
- I would like to talk with Hilary Fabian at school/in my own home about my expectations of the induction process.
- I am/am not happy for her to talk with \_\_\_\_\_ about his/her perceptions of starting school.

Name (Please print) \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 3b

## LETTER TO PARENTS OF JANUARY 1995 INTAKE

22 September 1994

Dear

Your child will soon be starting school. This is an exciting period in his/her life but it also makes a lot of demands, some social, some physical and some academic. It also makes demands on you so we are concerned to make this a happy and beneficial time for you all.

I am a lecturer in Early Years Education at the Crewe and Alsager Faculty of The Manchester Metropolitan University. As part of a study about starting school, your child's school and I are working together on a research project designed to add to our understanding of this experience. It is hoped that from the research some clear ideas will emerge that could help make the transition into school even better for children. For this to happen we need you and your child's views.

The research began with a selection of children who started school in September 1994. You and your child have been randomly selected from the group of children starting school in January 1995. The sample includes boys and girls, those who have brothers and sisters at school, and those who have not.

I would like to talk to you for about half an hour regarding your expectations, hopes and anxieties for your child starting school. I would also like to talk to him/her for about a quarter of an hour, with you present, in order to discover his/her thoughts and ideas about school. This can take place at school or in your own home, as you wish.

As the research develops you will be kept up-to-date by newsletter. We hope that you will be able to help in this important research. If you would like to take part please complete the slip below and return it to school by

Yours sincerely

-----

### STARTING SCHOOL RESEARCH

Please delete where applicable:

- I would/would not like to take part in the research which is exploring the transition and induction of children into school.
- I would like to talk with Hilary Fabian at school/in my own home about my expectations of the induction process.
- I am/am not happy for her to talk with my child about his/her perceptions of starting school.

Name (Please print) \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 3c

## LETTER TO PARENTS OF APRIL 1995 INTAKE

27<sup>th</sup> January 1995

Dear

Your child will soon be starting school. The start of school is an exciting time, but also makes a lot of demands so we are concerned to make it a happy and beneficial time. To achieve this the school and I are working together on a study about children starting school. The project began with some of the children (and their parents) who started school in September 1994 and has already helped to make the transition into school an even easier one.

I am a lecturer in Early Years Education and this is part of a wider study that I am undertaking which looks at the induction of children into school. In order to complete our picture of the 1994/95 intake of children I would like to talk to you for about half an hour regarding your expectations of the preparation for the start of school. Everything that you say will be treated in the strictest confidence. I would also like to talk to your child for about a quarter of an hour (with you present), in order to discover his/her thoughts and ideas about school. This can take place at school or in your own home, as you wish.

We hope that you will be able to help in this important research. If you would like to take part please complete the slip below and return it by Monday 6th February.

Yours sincerely

-----  
**"STARTING SCHOOL" RESEARCH**

Please delete where applicable:

- I would/would not like to take part in the research which is exploring the transition into school.
- I would like to talk with Hilary Fabian at school/in my own home about my expectations of this transition into school.
- I am/am not happy for her to talk with my child about his/her perceptions of starting school.

Name (please print) \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX 4a

## INTERVIEW SCHEDULES FOR CHILDREN BEFORE THEY BEGIN PRE-ENTRY VISITS

### Friends and school

1. Do you know anyone else who is starting school with you?
2. Tell me what you know about school.

### The teacher

3a. I wonder what your teacher will look like. Can you draw a picture of him/her?

While drawing ask:

- 3b. Have you met/seen your teacher?
- 3c. What does a teacher do?
- 3d. What will s/he be like? How do you feel about your teacher?

### The classroom

- 4a. What do you think your classroom will look like?
- 4b. What goes on in a classroom? What sort of things do you think you'll do there?
- 4c. Will there be rules? (things that you are allowed or not allowed to do)
- 4d. What will these be? How do you feel about that?

## USING PHOTOGRAPHS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

These children are at school, not at the school that you are going to. What do you think they are doing?

Photographs of:

registration	washing hands
writing	lining up
putting on apron	lunch time
working with clay	dressing up
screen printing	junk modelling
assembly	cutting out
looking at books	building with Lego
putting on coats	Changing for P. E.
the playground	dance and movement
sticking	cooking
painting	

There are some empty pages. Do you think there are any important photos missing?

What do you think the best thing is going to be about going to school?

Why do you think you're going to go there?

**APPENDIX 4b**

**INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR CHILDREN DURING  
FIRST WEEKS IN SCHOOL**

1. What do you do at school?

2. Who is in charge?

3. Who decides what you do?

4a. Do you know where everything is in the classroom?      YES      NO

4b. How did you find out?

5a. How do you know what to do?

5b. Is it okay if you don't know something?      YES      NO

5c. What do you do if you don't know what to do?

6a. Do you know the rules? Things that you're allowed to do and not  
allowed to do? YES      NO

6b. How did you get to know them?

10. Is it important to go to school?      YES      NO  
Why?

11. What is the best thing about school?

## APPENDIX 4c

## INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR CHILDREN AFTER ONE TERM IN SCHOOL

FRIENDSHIP

- |  |     |    |
|--|-----|----|
| 1. Have you got any friends?                             | YES | NO |
| 2. What's a friend?                                      |     |    |
| 3. What makes a good friend?                             |     |    |
| 4a. Who is your best friend?                             |     |    |
| 4b. How long have you been friends?                      |     |    |
| 4c. Did you play with him/her before you started school? | YES | NO |
| 5. What do you like doing together?                      |     |    |

BEHAVIOUR

- |   |     |           |
|---|-----|-----------|
| 1a. Are there rules at school?            | YES | NO        |
| 1b. What sort of rules?                   |     |           |
| 2. What happens if you break a rule?      |     |           |
| 3a. Are you ever naughty?                 | YES | NO        |
| 3b. How do you feel when you are naughty? |     | SOMETIMES |

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- |   |     |    |
|---|-----|----|
| 1. What does a teacher do?                |     |    |
| 2. Why do you come to school?             |     |    |
| 3. What do you learn at school?           |     |    |
| 4. How do you know what to do at school?  |     |    |
| 5. What do you like doing best at school? |     |    |
| 6. Do you enjoy coming to school?         | YES | NO |
| Why?                                      |     |    |

## APPENDIX 4d

## INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR CHILDREN AT THE END OF YR, 1995

Let's look at some photographs about school. These boys and girls don't go to your school, they go to a different school.

### 1. ARRIVING

a. Who brings you to school?

b. What happens when you leave \_\_\_\_\_ ?

c. Do you enjoy coming to school?    YES                      NO

di. Can you remember when you first started school? YES                      NO

dii. How did you feel then about leaving:      mum, dad  
   little brother/sister?

### 2. REGISTER

a. How do you like sitting down close to the other girls and boys in your class?

### 3. SAND, DOMINOES, COMPUTER, PAINTING, CUTTING, MAKING TEA

a. Which of these things did you think you'd be doing at school?  
sand, dominoes, computer, painting, cutting, making tea.

bi. How did you find using things that you weren't used to?

bii. What about the computer?

ci. Are there lots more things that you can do now that you're at school?

YES NO

cii. What sort of things?

### 4. BUTTONS, WORKSHEET, READING, JIGSAWS

a. Sometimes we help one another. Do you have friends that you help?

YES NO

bi. How many boys and girls did you know in this class when you first came to school?

bii. And now?

**5. BOYS LAUGHING**

- a. Do you think these boys are friends?      YES      NO  
b. What do friends do together?

**6. POKING PENCIL**

- a. Are these girls friends?      YES      NO  
bi. Do you sometimes fall out with your friends?      YES      NO  
bii. What happens?

**7. LEGO**

- ai. Do you sometimes do things on your own at school?      YES      NO  
aii. What sort of things?

**POINTING**

- ai. Do you have to share things?      YES      NO  
aii. How do you feel about that?

**8. MAKING CHOICES**

- a. Sometimes we have to make choices and decisions about which word to write, about what to do next, about which book to choose . . . . In what ways can you find out if you don't know about something?

**9. JIGSAWS, TALKING**

We learn about lots of things at school.

- a. What do you like about school?
- b. What don't you like?
- c. What's the most interesting thing you've done at school?
- d. If someone from another school came to visit would you be able to show them all the things in your classroom?      YES      NO

**10. ADULTS**

Here are some grown ups in school.

ai. Who are the grown up people in your school?

aii. What do they do?

bi. Do you remember when you first met your teacher?      YES      NO

bii. What did you think?

ci. Do your teacher and mum/dad talk together?      YES      NO

cii. Is this important?      YES      NO

ciii. Why?

Let's look at some other times during the day:

**11. ASSEMBLY**

a. How do you feel about being with lots of boys and girls?

**12. PLAYTIME**

a. What happens at playtime?

b. Do you enjoy playtime?      YES      NO

**13. LUNCH TIME**

a/b. What do you like/dislike about eating with the other boys and girls?

**14. WATER X 4**

ai. Can you remember playgroup/nursery?      YES      NO

aii. Is school different?      YES      NO

aiii. How?

## 15. RESTING

ai. Do you sometimes get tired at school?      YES              NO

a.ii. Why is that?

## 16. CHAIRS, LINING UP, MUMS AND DADS WAITING

This looks as if it's the end of the day.

a. Do you look forward to home time?      YES      NO

bi. Do you think mum/dad know about what you do at school? YES

NO

bii. Do you tell mum/dad what you do at school?      YES              NO

biii. Do you think they want to know?	YES	NO
---------------------------------------	-----	----

### Why is that?

That's the end of the photographs.

a. What happens next term?

b. What would you like to know about the next class?

ci. Are you looking forward to it?      YES              NO

cii. Why?

**APPENDIX 4e****INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR CHILDREN AT END OF  
Y1, 1996**

1a. What year are you in now?

1b. Do you remember when you became a Year 1? YES NO

1c. When was that?

1d. How does it feel to be a Year 1?

1e. Can you remember when you first started school? (Remind of process/  
whose class) What was it like?

1f. What are the differences in being a Y1 person to being a reception  
person?

2a. Do you know which class you'll be in next year, after the long holiday?  
YES NO

2b. Will you be in the same class as your friends? YES NO

2c. Is that important?

2d. How would you feel if you were split from them?

3a. How will you feel being a Y2? (What do you think it'll be like? How do  
you see yourself as a Y2? Will other people see you like that?) Discuss  
perceptions of YR/Junior children.

4. (For those changing class) You've got to know your teacher really well,  
how will you feel about having a different teacher?

4. (For those staying in the same class) Will you be having the same teacher  
next year? How do you feel about that?



5a. You know all the rules now; will they be the same next year? YES NO

6a. What else do you know about being in the next class/being a Y2?

6b. What are you looking forward to about changing class/being a Year 2?

6c. What would you like to know about the next class/next year that you don't yet know?

6d. Is there anything that you're worried about?

7a. Who brings you to school at the moment?  
Do they come inside to talk to your teacher?

7b. Will they come in as much when you're in Y2?

7c. What sort of things did they talk to your teacher about when you were in Reception? And this year?

7d. Will they still want to talk to your teacher next year?

7d. Is that important?                      Why is that?

8. Is there anything else that you'd like to tell me about moving from Year 1 to Year 2?

## APPENDIX 4f

# INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR CHILDREN SHORTLY AFTER THE TRANSITION TO Y2

**THE TRANSITION**

1a. Are you enjoying being in a new class? YES NO

1b. What are the good about it?

1c. And not so good?

**CONTINUITY**

2a. Are you with your friends? YES NO

2b. Have you made new friends? YES NO

3. Do you know where everything is kept in this classroom? YES NO

4. You have a new teacher, do you also have new rules? YES NO

5. How do you feel about the work?

**PARTNERSHIP**

6. Will mummy and daddy still want to talk to your teacher and see your work now that you're in Y2? YES NO

Why is that?

**APPENDIX 4g****END OF KS1 INTERVIEW FOR CHILDREN, 1997**

1. Can you draw a picture of yourself when you first started at school and now?
2. How have you changed?
3. And soon you'll be going to the Juniors. How do you feel about that? What do you think it will be like in the Juniors?
4. What will you miss the most when you leave the infants?
5. What are you looking forward to in the juniors?  
(Is there anything that frightens you about it?)
6. Is it important to be in the same class as your friends? Why is that?
7. How will you find out where everything is?
8. What sort of work are you expecting?
9. Do you expect to be able to play?
10. Will you be able to choose sometimes?
11. What's your new teacher like?
12. Will your teacher listen to you when you need to ask/know something?
13. Are the rules the same?
14. Are the other children in the Juniors friendly?
15. Do you tell mum/dad about what you do at school?
16. Will you next year?
17. What could we do at school to make the move to the Juniors a good one?

**APPENDIX 5a****INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PARENTS BEFORE  
THEIR CHILD ATTENDS PRE-ENTRY VISITS****THE SCHOOL**

1. Do you have any other children at this school? YES NO
2. Have you looked round the school? YES NO
3. Why did you choose \_\_\_\_\_ school to send \_\_\_\_\_ to? What were you looking for?

4. What sort of questions have you/will you ask the school?

- 5a. What sort of verbal or written information have you received/do you expect to receive about the school and \_\_\_\_\_ starting school?

- 5b. How did it/do you expect it to help?

**PRE-SCHOOL**

- 6a. Has \_\_\_\_\_ been to nursery/playgroup? YES NO
- 6b. What importance do you think this will have when \_\_\_\_\_ starts school?

7. Do you expect the school to have some contact with the nursery/playgroup? etc. YES NO

**VISITS**

8a. Before \_\_\_\_\_ starts school would you want the teacher to visit you at home?                      YES                      NO                      DON'T KNOW

8b. What are your thoughts on this?

9a. Before \_\_\_\_\_ starts school, how often would you expect to be invited to school?

With/without child?

9b. What would you want to happen on these visits?

9c. Would you want to meet parents of other new children? YES    NO

9d. How important do you think that is?

10a. What type of information do you think the teacher will need to know about children before they start?

10b. Would you expect to be asked to write something/complete a pre-school booklet telling the teacher about the sort of things that your child can do?                      YES                      NO

10c. How useful do you think this would be to you?

10d. To the teacher?

**PREPARATION**

11a. Have you bought or borrowed any books about starting school to help you 'get it right'?                      YES                      NO

11b. If YES How have/will these help?

12a. What will you do to prepare \_\_\_\_\_ for starting school?

12b. Do you expect the school to give you ideas on how to help \_\_\_\_\_ before s/he comes to school? What sort of thing?

13. What do you envisage happening on the first day?

14. What hopes and/or anxieties do you have about him/her starting?

15. How will you feel when \_\_\_\_\_ starts school?

16. Do you think the school can help you? How?

**AFTER SEPTEMBER/CHRISTMAS/EASTER:**

17a. Do you feel that you will have a part to play in \_\_\_\_\_'s  
education? YES NO

17b. What are the ways you feel you can best help?

18a. Do you think that the school will involve you with educating  
\_\_\_\_\_? YES NO

18b. What do you think they will suggest?

19. How do you see your relationship with the teacher and the school?  
What are you expecting?

20. Is there anything else you feel or anticipate concerning your relationship  
with the school that you would like to add?

## APPENDIX 5b

# INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PARENTS SHORTLY AFTER THEIR CHILD BEGINS SCHOOL

**SETTLING IN**

1a. How has \_\_\_\_\_ settled into school?

1b. Do you feel that the visit days last term helped? YES NO  
If YES. How? If NO Why was that?

(School A: Half days at beginning of term)  
(School C: afternoon visits last term)

2. Were the visits to school before \_\_\_\_\_ started what you wanted?  
YES NO  
If NO. How were they different?

3. Did you feel any better informed after the visit? YES NO  
If YES. In what areas did they help **you**? (not child)  
If NO. What would you have liked to have happened?

4. What did your child feel about the visits?

5a. Was talking/meeting with other parents important? YES NO  
5b. Why was that?

6. What point in the induction process do you consider to be the best time to meet and talk to the class teacher?

**PRE-SCHOOL PROFILES (School A)**

7a. Of what help was the pre-school profile booklet to you? 7b. Your child?

**TWO TEACHERS (School B: September and January Intake)**

7a. Next term s/he will only have one teacher (January Intake). How do you feel it has worked out this term with two teachers?

**FIRST DAYS**

8. How did you prepare your child for the start of school the day before s/he started?

9. What happened on the first morning of school?

10. Have there been any major changes in \_\_\_\_\_'s behaviour since s/he started school?  
Any surprises?

11a. Does s/he tell you what s/he does at school?    YES                    NO

11b. Do you want to know?   YES                    NO                    SOMETIMES

If YES. How do you think this could be achieved?

12. Do you feel that you are more aware now of educational issues?  
YES    NO

13. \_\_\_\_\_ gets one/two term(s) in the reception class. What are your thoughts on this?

14. What do you think are the main differences between playgroup and school?

15. Is there anything else that you would like to say about starting school?



**APPENDIX 5c**

**INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PARENTS AT THE END  
OF YR, 1995**

**SETTLING IN**

1a. Do you think that your child has settled into school?      YES      NO

1b. How long did it take?

2. What do you think are the signs of settling in?

3. What were the particular things which helped him/her adjust?

4. What did your child find easy/difficult to cope with during the transition to school? (visits and first weeks)

5. How did s/he cope with:

a. the size of group?

b. only having one teacher?

6. What about yourself? How did you adjust to not having him/her in the house so much? What effect has it had on you? (younger brothers/sisters)

**HINDSIGHT**

7. Knowing what you do now about the start of school, would you have done anything differently before s/he started? YES      NO

If YES, what would you have done?

8. Was there anything else that you would have liked the school to have done?      YES      NO

If YES, what was that?

9. Was there any other information that you would have liked?

YES      NO.

If YES, what was that?

10. Was the initial meeting (visit) at the right time (of day, in term) for you, your child?    YES                      NO

11. Was this the best age for your child to start school?            YES    NO

12. Did you know that children don't have to start school until the term after their fifth birthday?            YES                      NO

13. In what ways do you think your child has benefited from starting school early?

14. Have the benefits of early entry outweighed those of having him/her at home longer?    YES                      NO

15. The length of the school day is much longer than that of nursery, playgroup etc. Would you have liked a more gradual start?    YES    NO  
If YES, what would you have liked?

#### **MAKING SENSE OF SCHOOL**

16a. Do you know what goes on in the classroom now?            YES    NO

16b. How did you find out?

17a. Did the first parents' evening come at the right time?    YES    NO

17b. Did it help with what you wanted?            YES                      NO

#### **FRIENDSHIPS**

18. How important was knowing other children for your child during the transition to school?

19a. Have you made friends with parents of other children in the class?  
          YES    NO

19b. Is this an important factor for you?            YES                      NO

19c. Do you find 'talking at the gate' worthwhile?    YES                      NO

#### **PARTNERSHIP WITH SCHOOL**

20. Is the quantity of information to and from school about right?  
          YES                      NO

21. What things are helpful in continuing your partnership with school?

22. Is this partnership how you envisaged it? YES NO  
What more/less would you like?

23. How could the partnership be continued?

24. How do you see your child benefiting from home and school working together? (Now and future)

**MOVE TO YEAR 1**

25. What are your thoughts on the move to the next class?

26. How do you think your child feels about it?

27. Do you feel prepared for the move to Year 1? YES NO  
Why is that?

28. What importance do you put on this transition?

29. What are your expectations for the coming year?

30. Do you feel that our talks have helped or hindered the transition to school?  
How?

31. Is there anything else that you would like to say about your child starting school and the move to the next class?

**APPENDIX 5d****INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PARENTS SHORTLY  
AFTER THE TRANSITION TO Y1****THE TRANSITION:**

1a. How did the move go from Reception to Year 1?

1b. What were the influencing factors?

2. Was this the right time to move?                      YES                      NO

3. Did s/he adapt as well as at the start of school?                      YES      NO  
Why was that?

4. How do you think the transition at the very start of school affected this last move?  
(e.g. with regard to: Attitude to school? The move itself? Learning?)

**CONTINUITY**

5a. Do you know what happens in this class? YES                      NO

5b. Is it different from the Reception Year?                      YES                      NO  
In what ways?

6. Was the length of time in Reception important? YES NO  
In what way?

7a. Of what importance were friendships during the move from Reception to Y1?

7b. Have new friendships come about because of the move? YES NO

### **PARTNERSHIP**

8a. Do you feel the same need to be involved with the school now that s/he is in Year 1? YES NO

8b. How do you now see the partnership with school continuing? (What should it include?)

8c. What is your role/responsibility in this partnership?

9. Is partnership the same as involvement? YES NO  
How/why?

10. Does the geography of the school building help in accessing teachers?  
YES NO

11. Anything more that you would like to add?

**APPENDIX 5e**

**INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PARENTS AT END OF  
Y1, 1996**

Name:                      Class:                      Moved/not moved class?

**SETTLING IN**

1a. Did s/he settle easily at the beginning of Y1 (last September)?

YES    NO

1b. What were the signs?

1c. Was there anything in particular which helped/hindered?

1d. How do you think your actions as a parent helped/hindered the settling in process to Y1?

2a. How important was it to get a good start at the very beginning of school?

2b. How do you think the initial start of school affected the YR/Y1 move and subsequent settling in?/attitude to school?/behaviour?

2c. Do you think that the speed of settling in affected your child's learning at the start of school? And at the start of Y1?

**HINDSIGHT**

3. Was September the best time to change classes? YES    NO

Why? Difficulties? Anxieties during transition for child/you?

3. Did it help staying in the same class? Why? Difficulties?

4a. How could the school make the transition to Y1 easier?

4b. Would a parents' discussion, after the start of school, have been helpful? And after other transitions?

Would a 'link book' or something similar have helped in transitions?

4c. How can parents help in the transitions?

### **MAKING SENSE OF SCHOOL (Y1)**

5a. Do you feel you now know about the nature of your child's experiences at school?      YES                      NO

5b. Can you give examples of activities that are especially helpful for him/her in class?

Do you help at school?              YES                      NO

### **FRIENDSHIPS**

6. How important was establishing friendships for him/her at the beginning of the year?

7. Have you continued friendships with parents of children in his/her class/other classes after first move? YES                      NO

How important is that?

### **PARTNERSHIP WITH SCHOOL**

8. Do you still feel in touch with the school? YES                      NO

9a. Has the partnership changed since s/he started school? YES      NO

9b. Has the input to the partnership by the school changed? Of what does this partnership now comprise? Is anything else needed?

9c. What is your role and responsibility in this partnership now?

10a. How are you presently involved in his/her education?

10b. When do you communicate with the class teacher?

**MOVE TO YEAR 2**

11. What are your expectations (of school/child) as s/he approaches Y2?

11b. Do you feel prepared?    YES                      NO

11c. Is there anything else you need to know about this next move?

11d. Will you feel the same need to be involved with school when s/he is in Y2?

12. Will the fact the s/he has/hasn't been with a Y2 group influence the move? How?

13. How do you think s/he feels about becoming a Y2 person?

14. How important are his/her continuing friendships during the transition from Y1 to Y2?

Is there anything else that you would like to add about changing from YR to Y1 or Y1 to Y2?



## APPENDIX 5f

**INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PARENTS SHORTLY  
AFTER THE TRANSITION TO Y2****THE TRANSITION**

1a. How did the move go from Y1 to Y2?

1b. What were the influencing factors?

2. Was this the right time to move? YES NO  
Why was that?

3. How do you think the induction to school affected this move? (with regard to attitude to school, the move itself, learning)

4a. Did **you** feel prepared for his/her move? YES NO

4b. In what way? Or What else would you have wanted?

**CONTINUITY**

5a. Do you know what happens in this class? YES NO

5b. Is it different from Y1? YES NO  
In what ways?

6a. Of what importance were friendships during the move from Y1 to Y2?

6b. Have new friendships come about because of the move? YES NO

**PARTNERSHIP**

7a. Do you feel the same need to be involved with the school now that s/he is in Y2?

YES NO

7b. How do you see the partnership with the school continuing? (What would you like it to include?)

7c. What is your part in this partnership?

8. Is there anything more that you would like to say about the transition from Y1 to Y2?

**APPENDIX 5g****END OF KS1 INTERVIEW FOR PARENTS, 1997**

This is our last meeting and I'd like to talk to you about the move/transition that ---- is about to make to the juniors, about the initial induction to school and about the moves that s/he has made over the last three years.

**TRANSITION FROM KS1 TO KS2**

How big a step is it from infants to juniors?

What do you think your son/daughter feels about going to the Juniors next term?

What do you think s/he'll find difficult to get used to?

What will you miss most about the Infants?

How do you think parents can help in the move from Infants to Juniors?

How effective do you think the school has been in helping in the transition to the juniors?

**INITIAL INDUCTION**

What were your expectations for your child at the start of school?

Have they been realised?

Do you know the SAT results? En                      Ma                      Sc

Why was the start of school an easy/difficult process for your child?

you

Do you feel your child was ready socially/emotionally for school when s/he first started?

How effective was the initial induction in settling him/her into school?

How important was it that the YR teacher was right?  
In what way?

What was it that helped to overcome any anxieties?  
E.g. taking things to/from school/home

What advice would you give to parents of children just about to start school?

How did you find out about day to day life at school?

What type of contact/information with/from school have you found the most useful?  
What was missing?

**TRANSITIONS** (Different teacher, different classroom, other children joining class, child joins a different class)

Were the transitions through KS1 easy for  
your child?

you?

What eased them most/least?

Would you have liked a talk about the move before/after each transition? E.g. to talk about daily programme or gather additional information, ask questions?

How did the reputation of teachers affect your thinking about moves as child moved through school?

How important was the retention of friendship groups in the transition?

(Check information on number of moves)

In an ideal world what would be the best route through KS1 have been regards moves?

Anything else that you'd like to say about the start of school. The transitions through school or this coming move to the juniors?

What influence has my research had on your attitude to the induction/transitions?

## APPENDIX 6

## INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PRE-SCHOOL LEADER

1. Do you have a written 'transition to school' policy? YES NO

If YES, What is in it?

If NO, What is the general policy with regard to children transferring to school?

2a. How many schools do you 'feed'?

2b. Are there established links with these schools? YES NO

2c. If YES. What do these links comprise:

How many visits are there?

Do staff/children visit schools? YES NO

Do staff/children from schools visit you? YES NO

What happens on these visits?

If NO, would you like this to be different. If so, in what way?

Is this the same for all the schools? YES NO

3. Does this always follow the same pattern? YES NO

If NO. How are they different? (for example, are they the same each term?)

4. What are you aiming to achieve with these visits?

(If they would like to make visits but don't): What would you like to achieve?

5a. Are there any (other) preparations made in the playgroup to ease the transition? YES NO

How do you help the children prepare for the start of school?

What do staff do or say?

5b. Does the structure of the day change for those children who are approaching entry to school? YES NO

If YES. How does it change?

If NO, what is the structure?

5c.. How do you think all this helps the children?

6. Do you help the parents make the transition from playgroup to school?

YES NO

If YES. How ?

7. Many parents that I've talked with see playgroup as a preparation for school. How far is the playgroup likely to fulfil their wishes in this respect?

8. What do you think are the main differences between playgroup and school?

9. Are there any areas which you feel could be improved to provide a better start to school?

10. Is there anything else that you would like to say about the transition from playgroup to school?

## APPENDIX 7a

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR TEACHERS: PRE ADMISSION

1. Of what importance is the induction process?  
For yourself/school?

For the parents?

For the children?

2. Do you play a part in managing the induction process?    YES    NO  
If YES. How do see that role?

3. What do you consider induction includes?

### VISITS TO SCHOOL

4. What did the children do when they visited?

5a. What do you see as the main aims/priorities for these first encounters?

5b. How did you achieve your aims/priorities?

5c. Were there any constraints on achieving them? (did everyone attend,  
support teacher to take class?)

6. Were staffing resources different on 'visit' days?    YES                      NO



7. Did the children meet ancillary staff?      YES      NO

8. At what point did you meet the parents?  
AS A GROUP/INDIVIDUALLY

9a. Do the visits take the same format in each term? YES      NO  
9b. If NO. How are they different?

10a. Do you make home visits?      YES      NO

10b. If YES. What is the purpose of these visits?

11a. Do you visit the local nursery/playgroups?

YES      NO

11b. If YES: How often?

11c. What is the purpose of the visits?

12a. Do the local playgroups visit the school?      YES      NO

12b. What happens on these visits?

13a. How do you feel the induction could be improved?

13b. What are the constraints on this coming about?

14. Is there anything else you would like to say about the induction process?

## APPENDIX 7b

**INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR THE WAY IN WHICH  
TEACHERS MANAGE THE CHILDREN'S FIRST HALF  
TERM****FIRST DAYS**

1. How many times have you received a reception class before?
2. What did you do to prepare the classroom before the children started?
3. What did you plan for your initial meeting with your new children on their first day?
4. What was the procedure for the arrival of the new children on their first day?
5. How did the children react?
6. Were the parents invited to stay in the classroom during their child's first session?      YES      NO  
Why was this?
7. Did all the children start on the same day? YES      NO  
If NO. How was it organised?  
(same time? staggered intake?)
- 8a. How successful has the admission procedure been?  
In what ways were you successful?
- 8b. What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of organising the entry in this way?
9. What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of other ways of starting school? e.g. 2 or 3 intakes a year? Staggered intake over several days? Entry on day on which they are five?

**SETTLING IN**

10. What do you see as the priorities in teaching new entrants in their first few weeks in school?

11. How did you establish routines?

(Did the children go to the first assembly?    YES                      NO

Did the new children have a playtime?        YES                      NO

If YES. Did they join in with the rest of the school?   YES                      NO

What was the procedure at lunch time? Did they sit as a group or integrate with rest of school?)

12. How did you establish the rules?

13. How did you help the children to get to know one another?

14. Of what use were the induction days as regards settling in?

15. Has the children's behaviour changed since they started school?

YES                      NO

If YES. In what way?

**ASSESSING ABILITY**

16a. Did you try and build an accurate picture of each child before they began school? YES                      NO

If YES. How?

16b. How did the pre-school profile help in your assessments?

17. What were your expectations of the children when they first entered school?

18. What range of skills did the children bring with them when they started?

19. Did you have any form of entry profile when they started?

YES                      NO.

If YES. How has this helped?

If NO. How have you assessed the children?

(Did the children need to unlearn anything?)

20. Of what use were the induction days in helping you to assess the children?

## **PARENTS**

21. Did you meet the parents during the first days of school?

Did you see all of them?      YES                      NO

22. What do parents want from school?

23. How are parents encouraged to continue their partnership with school?  
(e.g. diaries, letters, meetings during first weeks, open door policy)

24. Anything else that you would like to say about managing the first weeks with the new intake?

**APPENDIX 7c**

**INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR YR TEACHERS AT THE  
END OF YR, 1995**

**SETTLING IN**

What are the signs that a child has settled into school?

In what ways did the pre-entry visits help?

Do you receive reports from nursery/playgroup about the children?

YES NO

How did you find out about previous knowledge/ experience of child?

**HINDSIGHT**

Is there anything that you would have liked to have happened before the children started school, e.g. on the visits, that didn't take place?

At the beginning of term?

**MAKING SENSE OF SCHOOL**

How were the children helped to 'become a pupil'?

How were they helped with assembly, playtime and lunch time?

Did the children's behaviour change after they started school?

YES NO

If YES, how?

### **FRIENDSHIPS**

What importance do you think friendships have at the start of school?

And during the move to the next class?

### **PARTNERSHIP WITH SCHOOL**

How are parents encouraged to continue their partnership with school?

Is there pressure from parents for early formal learning?

YES NO SOME

If yes, what form does this take?

How do you evaluate what parents felt about the induction process?

### **MOVE TO NEXT CLASS**

How were the children prepared for the transition to the next class?

Did they move as a group?

Were friendship groups taken into consideration? YES NO

How were parents prepared for the next move?

Anything else that you would like to say about the transition into school  
and the move to the next class?

## APPENDIX 7d

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR Y2 TEACHERS SHORTLY AFTER THE CHILDREN'S TRANSITION TO Y2, 1996

#### **THE TRANSITION**

1a. How do you think the children have settled into Year 2?

1b. What helped to settle them?

2. How do you think the induction to school affected this move? (with regard to attitude, the move itself, learning?)

#### **CONTINUITY**

3. How were the children helped to find out about being in Y2?

4. Were they encouraged to extend their friendship circle? YES NO  
How?

#### **PARTNERSHIP**

5. When the children first started school parents wanted to see the teacher quite often (usually daily) to see how their child was getting on (socially, intellectually). Do you think that parents still feel this same need?  
YES NO

6. How do you see the partnership with parents developing in Y2?

Anything else that you would like to add about the transition from Y1 to Y2?

**APPENDIX 7e**

**END OF KS1 INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR TEACHERS  
OF Y2, 1997**

How are the children prepared for the move to KS2?

What do you do when you get a new group to help them settle?

How do ensure continuity?

Friendships  
learning?

How do you think the number of transitions affect children?  
(different teacher, different setting, different combinations of  
children)

How do you think the induction to school affects other  
transitions?

Anything else that you would like to say about children's  
induction and transitions?



## APPENDIX 8a

**INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR INDUCTION/TRANSITION  
CO-ORDINATORS: PRE ADMISSION**

1. Of what importance is the induction process?  
For yourself?

For the school?

For the parents?

For the children?

2a. Do you take sole responsibility for managing the induction?  
YES                      NO

If NO. What is your role? Who else takes part? What do they do?

2b. Do you actively market your school?      YES                      NO  
If YES. How?

3. Do you have a written induction policy?      YES                      NO

4. How many children are there starting in September?

5. What happens when they register initially?

6. What written information do parents receive at that time?

7a. Can I just check that I have the format of the visits and dates correct for  
this intake?

7b. What do you see as the main aims of these visits?

8a. Do the visits take the same format each term?      YES                      NO

8b. If NO. How are they different?

**PARTNERSHIPS**

9a. Do you make home visits?            YES            NO

9b. If YES. What is the purpose of these visits?

9c. If NO. What are your thoughts on this?

10a. Do you visit the local nursery/playgroups?            YES            NO

10b. If YES. How often?

10c. What is the purpose of these visits?

11a. Do the local playgroups visit the school?            YES            NO

11b. What happens on these visits?

12a. Do you have any pre-admission loan schemes? e.g. toy/book library?  
YES            NO

12b. If YES. What sort of thing?

12c. What purpose does the loan scheme serve?

13. Do you have a booklet for parents specifically about starting school,  
apart from the school prospectus?    YES            NO

14a. Are parents asked to write an evaluation of their child before they start  
school? (Pre-school profile)    YES            NO

14b. If YES. What form does this take?

15a. Do you feel the induction process could be improved?    YES    NO

15b. If YES. In what way? What are the constraints on this coming about?

16. Is there anything else that you would like to say about managing the  
induction process?

**APPENDIX 8b**

**INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR INDUCTION/TRANSITION  
CO-ORDINATORS: END OF Y1, 1996**

1. What changes have there been to the induction procedure this year?

e.g.    structure of visits  
         information to parents/knowledge of school  
         entry profiles  
         developing the partnership  
         links with under-five's settings  
         helping parents prepare their child for school  
         settling in/first days

2. Has my research influenced these changes in any way? How?

3. How are the children introduced to the next class?

4. How has the structure of the school changed?

**APPENDIX 8c**

**INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR INDUCTION/TRANSITION  
CO-ORDINATORS: END OF Y2, 1997**

Are parents made aware of the sequence of events after putting their name on the list for starting school?

How has the start of school documentation/policy changed over the last three years?

How has the induction process changed over the past three years?

Are parents of children already at school asked about what they would have liked in the documentation/to have happened at start of school?

What do you see as the purpose of the pre-school visits for children?

Preliminary visits for parents?

Information pack?

How are children/parents informed/involved/prepared in the transitions through KS1?

And from KS1 to KS2?

(How much collaboration is there between schools at this move?)

Has my research influenced change in any way?

## APPENDIX 9

### EXAMPLES OF FEEDBACK TO SCHOOLS

8 May 1994

Dear

Thank you for organising the meeting with parents and letting me use your school for some of the interviews last week. It was much appreciated and I hope I didn't interrupt your days too much.

The findings have been very positive. Everyone has been very open and helpful, which has helped to make collecting the information easier than expected.

To give you a brief summary of results: All the children are looking forward to coming to school, although none of them were really sure what they are going to do or find there! After looking at some photographs of children at school they decided that it would be alright as many of the activities would be similar to those undertaken at the pre-school settings which they attend. They were all able to draw a picture of what they thought their teacher would look like (except one who did not want to). Most were unsure about the job of a teacher and several thought that she was there to cook their lunch. (At some of the playgroups the leader prepares their food).

All the parents had heard excellent reports of your school. Indeed, several had moved into the area because of its good reputation.

Those parents with children already at school are expecting their next child to undergo a similar induction process to that of their other child/children. Parents' expectations of the meetings included:

- wanting to meet other parents;
- wanting their children to establish friendships;
- meeting the teacher;
- looking round the school;
- wanting to be told how to prepare their child for school and;
- wanting to know something about the methods of teaching and the type of lessons that their children will be having.

None of the parents expected the teacher to make home visits as they are aware of the pressures which teachers are under.

Most parents have started to prepare their child for school through discussions, looking at books, buying uniform etc. 'First time' parents indicated that they would appreciate direction on this, would like to know what the school expects of them and want to be told what to do in order to

get it right. One parent suggested that it would be a good idea if she could talk to the parents of the present Y1 group “to see how they coped and what they went through”.

As regards the type of information which the school would require of them, many mentioned that they would expect to give information about medical conditions and religious beliefs. Most expected to be asked to write something, but many suggested that it would be too much for the teacher to take in. Again, there is an awareness of teacher overload. (One parent is concerned about her child’s speech and I suggested that she talk with you about it).

On anticipating the first days at school, although everyone is looking forward to their child starting school, they all envisage that they will be nervous, perhaps upset and rather lost. Two parents have planned a programme of events for themselves during that time.

Concerns about their child included:

- would he/she fulfil his/her potential, and ways in which they as parents could help with this;
- child’s initial shyness;
- lunch times, especially for slow eaters;
- child’s “uniqueness” would be lost;
- child would not be used to attending every day and after the initial euphoria the child would not want to attend and;
- not sure when the best time would be to talk to their child’s teacher. (before/after school).

All parents see the relationship with the school as a partnership. Some hope to be able to use their talents by volunteering their help at school, while others envisage this partnership as taking part in school events. Most see themselves helping with their child’s education in some way (hearing them read, generally encouraging them with their work). Some parents would welcome guidance on how to do this. Some parents view their child’s education as something which will help them, too. (For example computer skills.)

I hope this will be of some use to you for Tuesday. Looking forward to seeing you then.

Yours sincerely

7th November 1994

Dear

A slight delay in getting the results to you of those parents whose children started school in September, due to one family being on holiday until last week. However, I've now seen all ten.

All the parents have been very pleased with the induction that their children have received and felt that it has helped to settle their children into school. There were several comments along the following lines: "She got used to the environment" and "he would never have left (on the first day) if he'd not been there before." Several mentioned how useful and informative the 'tour' was but two were unsure as to what to do in the classroom and would have liked more guidance on this. Six parents also mentioned how impressed they were with you and your handling of the induction procedure.

The profiles were generally appreciated. Parents made observations such as "it asked you questions that you hadn't thought about" and "it carries the partnership into the home". However, two parents were not sure whether to complete it at home or at school as they felt their children were distracted by other things on the visits.

As regards the best time to meet the teacher, thoughts were equally divided: Five parents would have liked to have met the teacher before the beginning of term reflecting that "it may have been nice to meet her before term - an introduction and an opportunity to discuss things" and "they (the reception class teachers) could have done with coming in for half an hour". Of the other five, two already knew the teacher and three thought that they met the class teacher at the right time because "if you meet too many people you get confused" and "you need to know her face, we met her on the last visit". Two parents (one from each group) were concerned about the best time to speak to the teacher once their child had started school: "You have to pick your moments to speak with them" and "There never seems to be a time when you can get them to yourself". These were both parents who wished to speak confidentially to the teacher.

In preparing their children for school eight parents talked about getting the uniform. This appears to be a 'rite of passage' that parents feel needs to be gone through. Three mentioned giving their child a 'special' day on the Monday before school started. Two kept it as a very low key day as "I wanted him not to be tired and over excited".

On the first day there were no problems although a couple of parents could see difficulties looming and retreated quickly. Four of the parents were upset. The two who could see that their children were apprehensive felt

that their children had taken several weeks to settle into school. Others were “amazed” and “really pleased” at the speed with which their children had settled, although there were one or two upsets during the first week: One child thought that he was in the wrong room because he was not in the room where the visits took place, another “was over excited and was sent to the headmistress”.

The half days at the beginning of term have met with mixed reactions:

- Six parents thought that they were a good idea, although two anticipated that there would be problems the following week when they had to stay all day. However, this did not materialise.
- One child wanted to stay for the rest of the day and could not understand why he was being taken away.
- Two parents had small children and found it a problem going back and forth with a little one.
- One parent would have preferred her child to start all day from the beginning as “he needs total immersion; the longer he’s there, the more settled he is”.

All five girls and one of the boys tell their parents what they do at school. Three parents would like to know more about the day to day events and would “like to see what goes on in an infant classroom”. Two parents mentioned that they were “no longer in control” of their children. There were two concerns about reading: “She was quite upset with the book. There were no words and she was fed up” and “I didn’t know what the reading record was for. What was I supposed to do with the cards? What sort of things were you supposed to write?”

Changes in behaviour included tiredness, hunger, a decline in table manners and an increase in confidence. One total surprise was that “he hadn’t realised that there would still be family events. He thought there was no more swimming or holidays” as he thought that going to school meant that he would always be at school.

I hope that this summary will be of some help. I think that the general feeling of the parents is summed up quite well by one who said “Its been a fairly easy transition for me as well as for her”.

Yours sincerely



22 July 1996

Dear

Many thanks for letting me talk to the children last week about their forthcoming move to Y2. They are all looking forward to moving and talked about feeling grown up and big - a very definite sense of pride about "being at the top of the school". As you know I've also been talking with their parents (mostly mums) and the following represents eleven of the twelve talks - I'm seeing the last mum tomorrow.

There was a good deal of praise for the staff and the amount of progress that children had made since starting school. The parents of summer born children were particularly pleased that their children had stayed with their friends and the same teacher. This continuity meant that they didn't notice the transition from Reception to Y1.

The general feeling about transitions was that the children were happy to move if they were going with their friends. This held great importance, but equally parents wanted their children to continue developing further friendships. They were pleased that the children knew where they were going to go to and which teacher they would be having but they, too, would like to meet the teacher before each move. Parents said that, although they didn't feel the same need to be involved with transitions as they were at the start of school, they helped with each transition by talking about it. For those children with older brothers and sisters there was further insight into what might take place in the next class. Seven parents mentioned that the move to the Junior school would be a major transition in their child's life. Perhaps by implication this would be a major step for them too. As one parent said "it fills me with sadness that she's on the road to being a big girl. Parents have more difficulty with transitions than children".

As regards the transition to Y2, parents were agreed that it was time for a move - even those who last year had talked about how pleased they were that their child was going have two terms with one teacher. One mother said "I thought she needed continuity but she's ready for it. She's let go of this teacher and is looking forward to the next". There was a feeling that it was "a natural progression".

For those children who had been in a Y1/Y2 class this year parents thought that this would help. For those children who were in a YR/Y1 class, parents thought that this had given their child confidence and security.

As you know there were one to two worries about the next move. These included the way in which the classes were to be divided (friendship worries), confusion over the 'route' through school and the need to know

about the change of route, and finally a few worries about SATs, mainly linked to a lack of understanding about the nature of classroom experiences and whether or not their child is performing at the 'right level'.

I hope this will be useful to the school. Good luck in your new post. Thank you for your support - perhaps we can work together another time.

Yours sincerely

28 November 1996

Dear

Thank you for letting me talk with the twelve 'research' children who had transferred from Y1 to Y2 this year. Eleven of the twelve are enjoying their new class. Two because of being with their friends, three because of their teacher and seven because of the work and activities that go on in their class. One said that "when I first started school I didn't want to come, but I do now". There were a few comments about areas with which they were not so happy. These included four who thought the work was harder, two who wanted more play and two who weren't happy about pupil/teacher relationships.

All of them were with some of their friends and had made new friends as a result of the move. Two were concerned that they had been separated from their friends in the move. Eight of them felt competent at finding where resources in the classroom were kept, they all knew the class rules and six were confident with the level of work. They all thought that their parents would still want to talk to their teacher to "see how I'm getting on" and to "see our work and behaviour -- if I'm naughty".

I also talked with the mums of the twelve children. Seven felt that their children had settled quickly, five that they had taken some time. Indeed one was still not sure that her child had settled. There were a number of influencing factors for children settling into the class:

- the teacher;
- feeling "grown up";
- being with their friends;
- attitude to new situations and people;
- time and familiarity; and
- having a routine.

Reasons for not settling included:

- the teacher's attitude and ability to meet different learning styles;
- not being with their friends; and
- not knowing the physical layout of the building.

One parent commented that her child was worried about leaving the previous teacher and "letting her go" and that "the preparation into Y2 was minimal. The transfer arrangements were brief and a list of assumptions were made -- that they [the children] knew the teacher and the school".

Eleven parents felt that it was the right time to move to another class. Only one would have preferred her child to have stayed in the same class. There were comments that they "were ready to go up" as "another year with the same teacher and he would have got fed up" and "they've got to get used to change".

Regarding the parents own readiness for the move, six of them felt prepared. However, among these there was concern that they didn't know how to prepare their child or that the change might unsettle their child. Of the other six, comments included:

- "I felt anxious. I found it difficult finding the classroom on the first morning. I got quite agitated. There were people everywhere."
- "I didn't know the teacher."
- "I felt disconcerted because I wanted to see who's who. I felt I didn't know what's going on."
- "Perhaps you expect the transition to be better prepared than it was with familiarisation and [preparation for] hard work."
- I don't think I really realised how different it would be. I'm involved with the school and found out from others what she [the teacher] was like."

Seven parents thought that they knew about the learning that goes on at school. They thought that it was more structured than in Y1 and that there was less play.

Parents felt that their children's friendships are of great importance and were pleased that that their children had, for the most part, moved with their friends. Although they hoped that new friendships would come about because of the move only five had so far noticed any evolving.

Parents see their role in the partnership with school as a supportive one. Some mentioned their role changing as their children grew more independent. However, they still wanted to be involved with school, for the school to keep them informed and to give them guidance on how to support their child's learning.

There was a general concern about the "big transition next year". Five parents mentioned the transition to KS2 and were approaching it with some trepidation. Another worry mentioned by four parents are the forthcoming SATs and the pressure that is put on the school (and as a result, the children) to do well in the league tables. One mother commented "I want my child's needs to be the priority, to work at her pace and not be driven by the school wanting to be up in the league tables".

I think the main points from this are that parents appreciated their children moving at this time (originally many children were to stay in the same class for two years), and moving with their friends. Most children have settled well, although preparations need to be right both for children and parents. The receiving teacher plays an important part in this. Parents are willing to support the school, are worried about the SATs and see the transition to KS2 as a major step in their children's lives.

I hope that you find this useful and that the children continue to enjoy Year Two.

18.08.97

Dear

A brief note to bring you up-to-date with the final interviews that I completed at the end of term. I was asking the twelve parents in my sample about the transition from KS1 to KS2. Parents were divided on whether or not it was a major transition in their child's (and their) lives. The three who viewed it as a big step saw the separate buildings and playgrounds, and leaving the Y2 teacher as contributory factors. The other parents felt that the transition was very much a straightforward continuation and were relieved that their children were staying with their friends, although they, too, would miss their Y2 teacher. The parents also thought that they would miss the close contact with the KS1 staff and the ability to 'pop in' whenever necessary. Those with younger children were grateful that this opportunity would still be there, but those without younger ones felt that this is the end of an era and would now "feel isolated from the school". This is mainly due to the nature of the building and the need to wait outside for their children at the end of the day. This physical distance is translated into a distancing from the teacher and an inability to contact her.

Although the move to KS2 is seen as a positive one there were one or two problems that were identified that might occur:

- bullying from older children
- coping with a greater workload
- missing friends left behind in KS1 or who move to other classes
- homework
- writing with ink

All parents felt that they helped in the move from KS1 to KS2 by talking with their children, giving them encouragement, listening to their worries and discussing the positive aspects (clubs etc.) of the juniors. Older brothers and sisters also helped by giving their younger siblings an idea of what they might expect.

Parents felt that, on the whole, the school is very effective in making the transition to KS2 a smooth one for the children. Visits by the KS2 staff to see the children, KS1 teachers talking to their class about the move, children going to see their new classrooms and meeting their new teacher in situ and knowing who s/he is beforehand were all seen as helpful, confidence building exercises prior to the move. There were four parents who thought that they, too, would like some form of induction such as they had received at the start of school in order to meet the teacher and see the classroom before their child started at KS2. (Parents of the summer born cohort weren't shown round the school during the initial induction and therefore have little knowledge of the building.) They thought that this

would benefit the partnership, would help them in preparing their child and would give their child confidence by knowing that their parents also knew something about the juniors.

I also talked to the children about their thoughts. I started by asking them how they thought that they had changed since starting school. Most of them talked about physical differences, for example growing bigger, hair length etc. but some also mentioned feeling happier due to having formed friendships, having learned to read and write and feeling excited by school now.

Their feelings about going to the juniors are a mixture of nervousness and excitement although two were not looking forward to the move and two were worried about being bullied. They are looking forward to growing up or seeing older brothers and sisters.

They are expecting 'hard work' and homework. They also thought that they wouldn't be able to play because "once you've finished a piece of work you go on to another" and "even if you finish all your work you still have homework". They think that their new teacher will be 'nice' and 'pretty' although one also thought that she would be 'bossy'.

Eight children said that they would miss their Y2 teacher and four of them their friends who are staying in KS1.

Finally I asked how they thought that the school might help them in the move to the juniors. Several of them mentioned wanting the opportunity to make further visits and one would like to be able to talk to their new teacher in the autumn term about their previous teacher, so that she doesn't get forgotten. One even suggested that if you teach the little ones about the juniors early on in their school career then it would be easier for them when the time came to make the move!

I hope this is useful and that the children have a happy transition to KS2. Many thanks to all the staff and children for their time and perceptions about induction and transition over the last three years. I hope you all have a good holiday and enjoyed a well-deserved rest.

Yours sincerely

## APPENDIX 10a

### LETTER OF THANKS TO PARENTS 1995

27th July 1995

Dear

#### STARTING SCHOOL RESEARCH

Thank you for your help over the past few months in giving your time, thoughts and ideas to the “Starting School” research that the school and I are doing.

There are some early findings in which you might be interested. Parents generally:

- chose the school because of its proximity and its good reputation;
- are pleased with the introduction to school and the social adjustment that their children have made;
- were reassured by their children’s happiness at school;
- are pleased that their children have grown and developed in their first few months at school;
- are interested in what happens in the classroom.

As well as talking with you I’ve also talked with the children at school. Although many children were positive, but vague, concerning what school was about before they started, by the end of their first term they felt confident that they knew what to do and why.

The research will be on-going and I am following some of the children through each transition to the end of the Infants. I have already discussed this with you if your child is one of these. Thanks again to you and your child for helping in the research.

Best wishes

## APPENDIX 10b

### LETTER OF THANKS TO PARENTS 1996

9 September 1996

Dear

#### THE TRANSITION FROM YEAR 1 TO YEAR 2

Thank you again for your help with the research that the school and I are doing about starting school and the transitions to the end of Key Stage One (end of the Infants).

The findings about the transition from Year 1 to Year 2 indicate that generally parents:

- didn't feel the same need to be involved with this move as they were at the start of school, but helped their children by talking about it;
- are happy if their children are moving with their friend(s) but also want them to make new friends;
- are pleased with the teacher that their children are to be with for Year 2;
- feel that their children have gained in confidence during the last year;
- trust the school to teach their children well, and now see their role as supporting the school.

As well as talking with you I've also talked with the children at school. They are looking forward to being "at the top of the school" and felt quite grown up about being in Year 2.

As you know, if your child has moved to another class or teacher this term I shall be contacting you again nearer to half-term to gain your views on how s/he has settled this term. Otherwise my next visit will be my final one at the end of Year 2.

Thanks again to you and your child for helping in the research.  
Yours sincerely



## APPENDIX 10c

### LETTER OF THANKS TO PARENTS AT SCHOOL A 1997

October 1997

Dear

Many thanks for all your help during the past few years with the research that the school and I have been doing about the induction to school and the transitions through the infants. At the end of the summer term I talked to you about the move to the juniors and I thought that you might like some information about this final meeting:

Generally,

- parents saw the move to the juniors as a natural progression;
- parents had helped by talking to their children about the move;
- parents thought that the two schools had been effective in helping to make the transition to the juniors a smooth one for their children and envisaged few problems other than initial anxieties over 'new beginnings' in the first few days. Contributory factors to effectiveness were the close links between the two schools, the visits that the children and staff had made and, in particular, the invitation to parents to visit the juniors beforehand;
- parents felt that children with older brothers and sisters had an advantage as the younger child had seen the move happen previously;
- parents were pleased if their child was moving with particular friends; and
- parents felt that they would miss the close contact that had developed with the infants if this was their last child there.

I also talked to the children and found that they:

- were looking forward to going to their new school, making new friends and attending clubs;
- were expecting more work; and
- would miss their infant teacher.

I hope that the move went as well as expected, and that, as we approach half term, any initial anxieties have been overcome and the children have settled into their new school with a continuing excitement for learning.

Thank you again for all your help and I wish your child every success in their education.

Yours sincerely

## APPENDIX 10d

### LETTER OF THANKS TO PARENTS AT SCHOOL B

October 1997

Dear

Many thanks for all your help during the past few years with the research that the school and I have been doing about the induction to school and the transitions through the infants. At the end of the summer term I talked to you about the move to the juniors and I thought that you might like some information about this final meeting:

Generally

- parents saw the move to the juniors as a natural progression, although one or two saw it as a big step;
- parents had helped by talking to their children about the move;
- parents thought that the school had been effective in helping to make the transition to the juniors a smooth one for their children and envisaged few problems other than initial anxieties over 'new beginnings' in the first few days. Contributory factors to effectiveness were the visits that the children and staff had made in the summer term and the confidence that the infant teachers gave the children;
- parents felt that children with older brothers and sisters had an advantage as the younger child had seen the move happen previously;
- parents were pleased if their child was moving with particular friends; and
- parents without younger children at the school felt that they would miss the close contact that had developed with the infant staff.

I also talked to the children and found that they:

- were looking forward to going to their new school, making new friends and attending clubs;
- were expecting more (and harder) work; and
- would miss their infant teacher and any friends who were staying in the infants.

I hope that the move went as well as expected, and that, as we approach half term, any initial anxieties have been overcome and the children have settled into their new classes with a continuing excitement for learning.

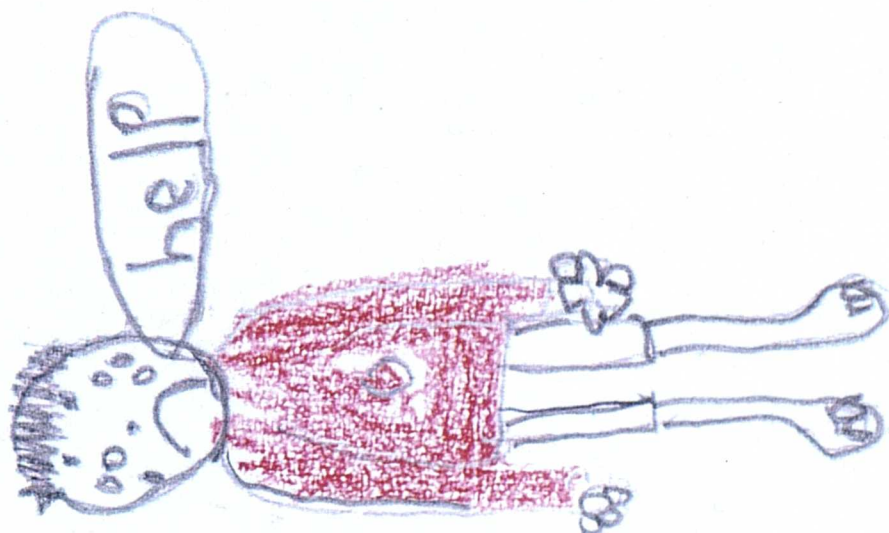
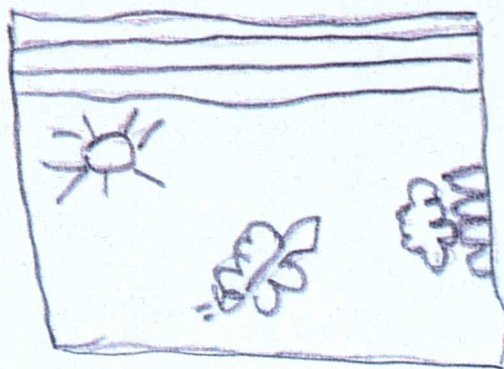
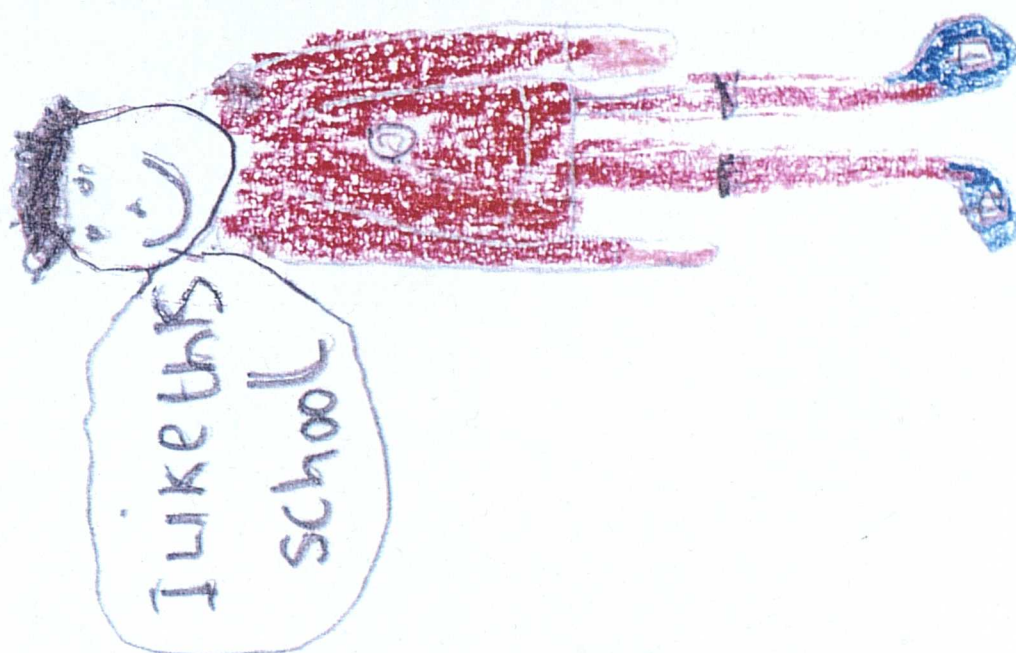
Thank you again for all your help and I wish your child every success in their education.

Yours sincerely

**APPENDIX 11**

**CHILDREN'S DRAWINGS**





**APPENDIX 12****QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS**

**'Debbie and Lorraine take their children to school':  
Questionnaire**

I am concerned that findings from research, that might help practitioners to question their own practice, often isn't discussed. Last term we looked at some findings from some research about children's induction visits to school. Please could you help by answering a few questions about the way in which the findings were presented.

1. What were your thoughts on having research findings presented in this format?
  
2. How did it encourage/discourage you from accessing the information?
  
3. How did it/didn't it help you to consider the possible alternatives to induction visits?
  
- 4a. Did it make you question practice in your setting?  
YES NO
- 4b. If so, how?

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. If you would like to add any further comments about gaining access to research please comment on the other side.

## APPENDIX 13

## PUBLICATIONS

Conference contributions:

- Fabian, H. (1994) "The Transition from one Setting to Another: From Pre-School to School". Poster presented at EECERA 4<sup>th</sup> European Conference on the Quality of Early Childhood Education. Goteborg, Sweden, 1-3 September.
- Fabian, H. (1995) "Children starting School: Parents in Partnership" Symposium presentation at EECERA 5<sup>th</sup> European Conference on the Quality of Early Childhood Education. Paris, France, 7-9 September.
- Fabian, H. (1996) "Phototalk: Interviewing Children" Symposium presentation at EECERA 6<sup>th</sup> European Conference on the Quality of Early Childhood Education, Lisbon, Portugal, 1-4 September
- Fabian, H. (1997) "Reporting Data" Symposium presentation at EECERA 7<sup>th</sup> European Conference on the Quality of Early Childhood Education. Munich, Germany, 3-6 September.

Professional Journals:

- Stelling, C. and Fabian, H. (1996) "An Open Door" in Child Education. Volume 73. Number 1. January. pp.54-55.
- Fabian, H. (1996) "Children Starting School: Parents in Partnership" in Mentoring and Tutoring. Volume 4. Number. pp.12-22 (refereed)
- Fabian, H. (1997) "Early Promise: Early Warning" in MGA Journal. Volume 4. February. pp.1-6.
- Fabian, H. (1997) "Interviewing Young Children" in Didsbury Ideas. Volume 8. Number 1. pp.12-16.
- Fabian, H. (1998) "Open Enrolment: Parental Choice or Confusion?" in Didsbury Ideas. Volume 8. Number 2. pp.-12.